

Stephen Phillips

The Dramatist - His Poems - His Dramas.

by

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In grateful appreciation of their constant
interest and encouragement the
writer dedicates this study to her

Mother

and

Father.

PREFACE.

It was in her junior year in Ottawa University (Ottawa, Kansas), in the winter of 1923, that the writer first became interested in the present study. A course in contemporary drama suggested the field of poetic drama, and a perusal, at that time, of "Paolo and Francesca" by Stephen Phillips aroused an appreciation for ancient stories retold in poetic dramatic form. During the ensuing years, the writer became fascinated with the life and works of the poet and dramatist, Stephen Phillips. In the fall of 1929, at the suggestion of Professor Whitcomb that the writer continue the study of Mr. Phillips, the present subject was chosen for research work.

Mr. Stephen Phillips was, at the beginning of the twentieth century, an interesting and the most outstanding figure in the English literary world. Fifteen years later, when he died, there was scarcely a single obituary notice which did not adopt a half-veiled but unmistakable attitude of apology. What had happened in the meantime? This poet, who was the chief exponent of the English poetic drama, his works and his career constituted a challenge for the writer.

An intensive effort has been made in this paper to set forth the principal characteristics of Stephen Phillips, of his poetry, his dramas, and of his dramatic

career. The thesis covers a period of about fifty years, beginning with the date of the poet's birth in 1864 and extending to the immediate years after his death in 1915.

The writer, with sincere appreciation, acknowledges the cooperation and aid received from the staff members of Watson Library. Above all, she wishes to express warm appreciation of the late Professor Selden L. Whitcomb for his kindly and personal help in the preparation of this manuscript. She wishes, also, to thank Professor R. D. O'Leary for his kindly assistance in the completion of this thesis.

Elsie Lora Wood.

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Chapter One.

Biographical Sketch of
Stephen Phillips.

" True, the harp, the song,
The theater, delight this dreamer."

Hero, Act I
Lines 90-91.

Chapter One

A Biographical Sketch of Stephen Phillips.

The poet and dramatist, Stephen Phillips, was born at Summertown, near Oxford on July 28, 1864. As a lad, he was reared in a most orthodox manner. His father, at one time Precentor and later Canon of Peterborough Cathedral, was a man of some dramatic insight and an admirer of fine arts; but it was from his mother that Stephen inherited a feeling for poetry and also a contemplative melancholy which is the keynote of his life and of his poems. His mother, formerly Miss Agatha Sophia Dockray, was a cousin of William Wordsworth; it is, perhaps, from this strain of poetic relationship that Stephen Phillips received his genius.

No doubt, he owes his genius to his mother, who with her keenly aesthetic instincts, her brilliant intellect and her highly sensitive nature had a marvelous influence over her son. The story is told that Stephen, in a boyish fashion, cared nothing for books or study, and revolted against anything in rhythm or rhyme. During his fifteenth year an abrupt change was in evidence. While he was attending school away from home he was seriously ill; his mother, upon one of her visits to his bedside, read to him Coleridge's "Christabel", that soft, floating witchery of sound. This vivid bit of fancy awakened in him a latent

passion for rhythm and for song. It was then that he determined upon his life career - the career of a poet. For some years he wrote constantly, never achieving the perfection that he sought.

Characteristics of restless youth were very evident in Stephen's make-up. A brother, Harold D. Phillips, says, "As a boy Stephen Phillips was most difficult to manage - turbulent, restless, with, at times, an almost fiendish temper, and combining extreme sensibility to personal suffering with a positive delight in teasing and torturing his younger and weaker brothers. This was, however, a purely boyish phase which he afterwards completely outgrew."¹

It seems that he was an unpopular lad at school; when about twelve or thirteen, he returned home from school so broken down with rough treatment that it was necessary to keep him under a doctor's care for some time. However, that happened in the good, old days when it was a universally accepted dogma with the English school boy that unconventional-ity and originality, even in the smallest form, were not to be tolerated but punished by mental and physical chastisement.

Not only idiosyncrasies of a dormant genius caused all the persecutions for Stephen Phillips, but also his innate characteristics of moroseness. While in his teens, Stephen was a melancholy lad; he was not a good mixer nor what the

1. Bookman, LII, Nov., 1920, pp. 213-214.

English term a "good fellow". With his teachers he was by no means a favorite, as he took no pains to conceal his contempt for and amusement at their limitations and characteristics. Also, like many who in later life became famous, he disliked school work and showed no ability in that direction, particularly in mathematics and in the sciences. One might naturally expect his tastes to run toward classic language and literature, and that they did. He had a deep appreciation for some of the beauty of Greek and Latin lines and would, at times, become passionately engrossed with them.

Through out his educational career, he attended Trinity College School, at Stratford-on-Avon, King's School, Peterborough and Oundle School in 1878. In 1883 he was recommended for a minor scholarship in classics at Queen's College, Cambridge. Difficulties, of some kind, arose so that he was unable to remain long in the university.

After leaving school, Mr. Phillips worked for a time for the Civil Service, but he grew weary of the monotony presented by such an unimaginative career and rebelled. About 1885 he joined the theatrical company of his cousin, Sir Frank R. Benson, and made the round of British provinces. "Benson's troupe was made up for the most part of men of culture, many from Oxford and Cambridge, but a wilder, more daredevil set could hardly have been found in England.

... Stephen was among the most reckless, engaging in wildly extravagant practical jokes at the expense of the public, defying all laws and regulations of conduct, and along with his boon companions frequently coming into collision with the police."² However, through out his life, his was a sin against conventionality, a revolt against constraint and repression. He wished for freedom in every way.

The brother, Harold Phillips, reports that the most important role played by Stephen Phillips was that of Iago, but in his efforts to avoid all that smacked of the typical conception, he created an Iago of a straight-forward, bluff, manly villain type that eliminated any suggestion of the sinister in the character. According to other reports, he made his reputation as an actor in the part of the Ghost in Hamlet. It is said that he acted this with a dignity so awful, and spoke with such a calm, sepulchral voice that the audience was held spell-bound; in fact, he was called before the curtain, a distinction for this role, believed to be unparalleled. Even though Mr. Phillips may not have become famous as an actor, he must have been more than fairly presentable as he continued to be a member of the company for six years. The knowledge which he gained in this period of the practical side of stage-craft served as a foundation for his later productions of the poetic drama.

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Before he had adopted the stage as a career, Mr. Phillips had privately printed in 1864, a volume "Orestes and Other Poems". This was probably at a time when John Churton Collins, a staff member in the civil service, had helped Phillips to discover that poetry had claims on him. During the first few years of wandering as a player, the young man neglected his talents and his ambition to be a poet. It is no light task to meet ~~the~~ conscientiously the responsibilities of an actor in a traveling company, and at the same time to realize any leisure.

In the course of his peregrinations, Mr. Benson brought his strolling players to Oxford and kept them there for some time. It was there at the university that Mr. Phillips met and formed a lasting friendship with his cousin, Mr. Lawrence Binyon, himself a poet. "Conversation with his cousin and with a very strange young Indian of various talents, Mr. R. Ghose, led him into the paths of poetry again. The result was a little pamphlet of neglected verse, now curious to the collector, called 'Primavera', published in Oxford in 1888. Of Mr. Phillip's contributions to this volume, he had not considered any mature enough to be preserved."³ Mr. Phillips was not the most undenied poet of the four. Mr. Lawrence Binyon, who also since made a reputation, showed the more delicate accomplishment, and Mr. Arther Cripps had the finer lyric impulse.

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The thirst for excitement and for sensation was not completely met by the nightly appearances before the curtain and by the humdrum routine of stage life; this unsatisfying life reacted upon his nervous system until he was compelled, in 1892, to leave the stage and to seek other employment. For about six years, from 1892 to 1898, Phillips became an army tutor or coach in history. Although he knew practically nothing about the subject, and his predecessor had been quite renowned for historical research, once his interest was aroused, the adventure justified itself.

The friendship with Lawrence Binyon in the university, began to be fruitful during Phillip's career as a tutor. The cousins were constantly in touch with each other, and it was then that Binyon, recognizing as none other had, the possibilities and the promise which lay latent in a few of the early poems, "deliberately set to work to stimulate him to greater efforts, the plan being that each should produce a poem once a week and then meet and compare notes."⁴

This was the beginning of Mr. Phillip's climb to fame; but he had to be pushed every step of the way by this gifted and unselfish relative. Through these years of apprenticeship, Mr. Binyon forced him against his will to interview publishers and to write more and more to meet their demands. Through out his life, he had to struggle

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4. Bookman, LII, Nov., 1920, p. 15.

constantly against a stupendous inertia which grew as the years passed and made almost every form of activity a supreme effort. This life-long inertia was, perhaps, the root of what eventually proved fatal to his career. Much credit is due the cousin, Mr. Binyon, for his supreme belief in the powers of the poet and his influence over the man.

The rising poet gave himself more and more intently to the great masters of song, especially to the Greek and to Milton. He realized that the branch of poetic work which had recently been most neglected was blank verse; it was his determination to restore to that most difficult and most delicate forms of verse; its richness, its variety, and its old dignity.

It was in 1894 that "Eremus, a Poem" appeared as Mr. Phillips's first independent publication. Even after its appearance it was the author's intention to suppress it as he regarded it as a work purely in the experimental stage, an exercise in versification. "Eremus" is written in a conventional, though careful, type of blank verse, which is ill-constructed and lacks the lyrical movement of unrhymed iambs which is Mr. Phillips's glory in later years.⁵

To the general public, Stephen Phillips was introduced, as a young poet to whom respect might be due, by the

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5. Century, XXXIX, Jan., 1901, p. 431.

publication of a thin tract called "Christ in Hades" (1897). This visionary piece revealed to the people something of Mr. Phillips's talent; the very opening lines proclaimed a new poet, -

"Keen as a blinded man, at dawn awake,
Smells in the dark the cold odor of earth;
Eastward he turns his eyes, and over him
A dreadful freshness exquisitely breathes;
The room is brightening, even his own face!"⁶

But his fame as a poet was made complete, when the next year, 1898, there issued from the press a volume of "Poems", hailed particularly for the masterpiece "Marpessa". In this, the world was given a poem most intrinsically beautiful both in conception and in structure. It is said that of these new pieces "The woman with the Dead Soul" and "The Wife" were the earliest composed. "These show a tendency to exchange the spectral dignity of 'Christ in Hades' (and indeed of 'Ieremias' itself) for a treatment of realistic themes, pathetic episodes of London life today."⁷

The success of "Poems" of 1898 encouraged him to adopt letters as a profession. As Mr. Phillips realized something of his talent for charging lyric or narrative matter with dramatic sense, his ambition was reawakened to write poetic drama. For the next ten years this was his chief occupation.

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6. Stephen Phillips, Poems, p. 84.

7. Century, XXXIX, Jan., 1901, p. 431.

The literary and dramatic world was overpowered by the achievement of "Paolo and Franchesca", a four-act tragedy which was printed in 1900. The critics, swept from their feet by this dazzling success of this exquisite piece, hailed the new dramatic poet as the successor of Shakespeare and of Sophocles. Mr. William Archer in the Daily Chronicle extended the highest praise possible: "Sardou could not have ordered the action more skilfully, Tennyson could not have clothed the passion in words of purer loveliness."⁸

This must have been a period of golden productivity for Mr. Phillips, for the same year, 1900, brought forth on the stage, "Herod", a drama of great magnificence and grandeur. After Mr. Tree's sumptuous presentation of "Herod" in His Majesty's Theater on October 31, 1900, and of "Ulysses" on February 1, 1902, and of "Paolo and Franchesca" on March 6, 1902, in St. James's Theater, the scholarly critics acclaimed Mr. Phillips as an equal of Dante and Sophocles; the public bought editions of his plays and poems and feverishly filled the theaters where his dramas were being produced. People who considered poetry spoke of him not only as a poet, and a rare poet, as that still rarer genius, a dramatic poet.

This stupendous and dazzling success had a most peculiar and perverse influence upon the poet. He seems

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to have possessed no balancing power, he had nothing to stay his character against such enthusiastic laudations. A child-like simplicity is all that guarded him from severe criticism, a naïveté that made inoffensive all his inflated ego and his conceits. Was he rapidly becoming a prig? Indeed, and unhappily, he was one of those unfortunate individuals who are ruined by success. Now with more funds at his disposal, he plunged into excitement of every kind and so lived a life devoted to pleasures and sensuality that his joy as a poet was slowly deadened. "All sense of inspiration was lost to him, even the poet's ordinary satisfaction in the beauty of his own lines. All this reacted on the quality of his work more and more and the result was apparent from the production of "Nero", 1906, until his death in December, 1915."⁹

In the meantime, "The Sin of David" published in 1904, and produced in 1905, seemed at first to be a return to the genuineness and severity of his earlier manner, but the sterner air is accidental, due to the commonwealth setting. Here is a great effort which after all only produces a melodramatic situation.

However, his fame as a non-dramatic poet still remained and was strengthened by his next collected volume "New Poems" of 1908, which justified his reputation. Its "Endymion" has less and its "Quest of Edith" none of the dramatic feeling that gave vitalizing power to "Marpessa."

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9. Bookman, LII, Nov., 1920, p. 215.

After "New Poems", "Bride of Lammermoor", and "Faust", 1908, a collaboration with Mr. Comyns Carr, Mr. Phillips passed out of sight for a while. The breaths of extreme praise that had blown so warmly upon him began to blow cold. A new group of young aspirants and critics discounted Mr. Phillips as of no account poetically; a few older men remained to praise him, but what they now said of him was discredited by the extravagant eulogies which had gone before.

Other writers became very prominent before the public eye - Yeats, Synge, Massfield, - there was nothing left for Stephen Phillips. There was financial bankruptcy and seemingly a spiritual bankruptcy. There had been difficulties that left his home broken. His will was broken, it seemed, and he was less creative. Through out his career, he felt his life to be a losing struggle against a destiny which was himself. "Yet, those who looked upon him with sympathy noted that his many troubles did not bring cry or lamentation from Stephen Phillips. They began to see too that he was making an effort toward reconstruction."¹⁰

In 1910, the drama, "Pietro of Siena", was published, and his longest poem, "The New Inferno" appeared. Mr. Phillips began, in 1913, to be something of a force again: he became

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10. New Republic, V, Dec. 25, 1915, p. 193.

editor of the "Poetry Review" and wrote good critical articles. That he had 'come back', that his reconstruction was a real one can be seen in the volume published in 1913, "Lyrics and Dramas".

"Armageddon", 1915, his last drama, has no merit beyond that of patriotic intention. His poetic career came to a close with the verse "Panama and Other Poems", 1915, which is his worst in that kind. He continued his literary work as editor of the "Poetry Review" until his death on December 9, 1915.

Now that an account of Mr. Phillips's works has been set forth, it will be well to become better acquainted with the man himself. We shall retrace our steps to the year 1891 or 1892 and get a glimpse of a romance which very soon culminated in marriage.

While in Mr. Benson's company of players at Stratford-on-Avon, Mr. Phillips met Miss May Lidyard, a very young girl who had just begun a stage career. In fact, her seventh or eighth engagement had taken her to Stratford-on-Avon to join Mr. Benson's company at the Memorial Theater. Let Mrs. Stephen Phillips pick up the golden thread of the story here and recount her meeting with her future husband:

"On the night of my arrival they were playing Hamlet, and not having to appear in that cast myself, I went into the house to witness a part of the performance. Strange to say

I entered the building just as the Ghost appeared and the vivid impression I felt at the time caused me to ask my friends close by to tell me the name of the man who was playing that rôle. The voice had a strange and bewildering attraction for me. A power it seemed that laid hold of my peculiar imagination. There were no programs at hand and I was told that I should meet him next day at rehearsal, and so I was satisfied that night not to know his name; but for many hours I was troubled by the thought that somewhere before I had known the voice.

"The next day I attended the theater for rehearsal. We were very late; I had almost given up in despair that I should not meet him that day when suddenly he appeared. He came from the opposite side of the stage to where I stood, and as he approached the center with a slow and dreamy gait, he stopped quite suddenly to gaze at me. Our eyes met, I remember his were beautifully clear and blue, and for a short time we stood gazing at each other in perfect stillness. He told me afterward that a strange light that appeared to float about me had attracted him to where I stood, and that I looked such a child".¹¹

That was the first meeting, and soon after they became engaged. In much less than a year, in 1892, Gabrielle, as she called him, and Madgie, as he called her, were married and left the stage. Mrs. Phillips soon realized that the

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11. Independent, LXXVII, Feb. 23, 1914, p. 275.

life of a poet's wife was both a pleasure and a hardship. Mr. Phillips was not an ordinary man, but like most poets, he was "more often a spirit full of the strangest, the most vibrating, as well as the most irritable of moods".¹²

It was their custom, a pleasurable custom to him, to devote the morning to work. Mrs. Phillips would play the part of stenographer while he, striding up and down the room would dictate his lines. Often the afternoon would be spent in a leisurely and cheerful manner - she would read aloud to him from some bright and pleasant story, or they would sit side by side, each reading in turn some book beloved by both.

About three years after their marriage, a baby was born, a daughter idolized by her father. It seems that she inherited her father's beauty, the clear, blue eyes, the brow and the dark brown, wavy hair that were distinctly his. The little life so enshrined within their hearts slipped away, and it seemed that the father could never be comforted. Even the gift of a son never entirely softened the blow, though he was a lovely boy and much beloved by his parents. This sadness, in part, is reflected in the poem "A Glean!"

"Ah! You and I love our boy!
And yet when we wander out in the falling darkness,
...
Then I know that it is not of him you are thinking
sorely,
But still you remember the other, the girl-child
that vanished,

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Source had we kissed her with awe, when she
died;
We but named her, and lost her.

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But because of her swiftness in passing,
Because she just smiled, and died;
She moveth us more than the other to tender
thought,
And the wistful puzzle of tears."¹³

After this trial, Mr. Phillips was often the victim of utter melancholy, baffling in its torture; oftentimes, he would rush from the house in a state of extreme frenzy. Occasionally he was driven by this melancholia from his home and his wife, leaving her alone and sad, feeling that she had lost her husband. After such an outburst, Mr. Phillips would sometimes send her a note asking forgiveness or to tell her that she alone could save him from himself.

Both the poet and his wife loved the sea; it had an alluring attraction for them that healed the wounded minds and would lull their weary souls to peace and rest. They "sought the influence of the sea and gloried in the wide expanse of strength and wisdom that it brought."¹⁴

Another influential factor in his life was his wife's mother - an understanding woman whose interest in the poet's work was an inspiration. "There was no line or poem that escaped her hearing, and it was a chief delight to my husband to read all his new work to us at the end of the

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13. Stephen Phillips, New Poems, pp. 49-51.

14. Independent, LXXVII, Feb. 23, 1914, p. 276.

garden close to a bank of wild flowers. My grandfather was an astronomer, and my mother would tell of many wonderful ways of the heavens. All this had a great allurements for my husband. And many, many times till long after midnight when the stars were full and bright above our heads, we would sit and talk together of many strange and beautiful things."¹⁵

But what became of the home? By 1908, it was broken by a separation. At his death, after a short illness, Phillips was survived by his wife and son.

The man, though a poet who suffered a poet's genius, who was a victim of melancholia and recurrent fits of depression, was, by nature, generous, hearty and sociable; he had a keen sense of humor, was an excellent raconteur and a fine cricketer. Through his life, Stephen Phillips was blessed with an influential circle of friends who took a deep interest in the poet and in the man.

Sir Sidney Colvin was for years his wisest literary critic; and took a fatherly interest in the man. This attitude at times irritated the poet for he wished to be untrammelled, to be free from any restriction which might be flavored with any suggestion of the puritans. At one time an acquaintanceship sprang up between Mr. Phillips and Oscar Wilde, but there was not much in common between them.

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15. Independent, LXXVII, Feb. 23, 1914, p. 276.

Long and intimate were Mr. Phillip's relations with Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree. "To the latter, he owed an immense debt for the wide publicity given to his work through the stage, but Sir Herbert's influence was by no means always for the best, for in his endeavors to popularize my brother's works he would frequently suggest by-play to the gallery and so do much to counteract the more idealistic influences of Sir Sydney Colvin."¹⁶

It was in his own home or in a friend's home in the company of intimate friends that Mr. Phillips was his natural self - his inherently noble, his best self. It has been doubted if Mr. Phillips was at his best as an actor on the stage; a home environment and an atmosphere of sympathy and understanding as created only by intimates were essential to bring out the fine qualities of his character.

As a reader, Mr. Phillips was exquisite. In ordinary conversations his voice was not extraordinarily beautiful; it was clear and musical - that was all. "But in speaking poetry his voice was as different from the voice to which one was accustomed in conversation as is a lit taper from the same taper when unkindled."¹⁷

Mr. Kernahan, who knew Mr. Phillips personally, can tell most vividly of the genius of the poet and his magnetic power as a reader:

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16. Bookman, LII, Nov., 1920, p. 217.

17. Kernahan, Coulson, In Good Company, p. 145.

He would begin to read or to write with slow unemotional deliberateness - the enunciation perfect, and the voice exquisitely modulated - but at first there was just a suspicion of a chant, an incantation, as if by a spell to call up the Spirit of Poetry before us. It was beautiful, it was the perfection of elocutionary art, but for the time being it seemed cold and afar from us and our lives, like the frozen marble beauty of Greek statuary. Soon his voice would deepen, and the room become strangely still. It was the listeners now who reminded one of statuary, for each sat unmoving, scarcely breathing, every sense, every thought, centered on the reader who, his great eyes ablaze, yet all unseeing, sat as if in a trance. This was no longer Stephen Phillips, our friend and intimate with whom we had walked and talked.

...And for the moment, and while the spell was upon him, and upon us, the soul of Stephen Phillips, when he was thus entranced by poetry, seemed scarcely less far-removed from us, and from our little world, than are the newly dead. For though to no mortal has the soul of a man been visible, to some of us who have listened to

Stephen Phillips in those rare moments, it seemed as if the soul of a man had at least become audible.

Then in some vague way, one's thoughts wandered back to the time when God walked in the Garden in the cool of the evening, and His Voice was heard by mortals. For then the exigencies of Time and Space were abrogated. The little room, wherein the poet sat and read, while we listened, was so strangely transformed for us, that we saw the vision of Dante and Milton unfold themselves before our eyes. The poet could so speak a word as to make it seem like the Spirit of God breathing upon the face of the waters, and, calling new worlds into being. He could so speak that single word as to make it almost a world in itself.

... Some godlike spirit, outside himself, seemed, in these supreme and consecrated hours, suddenly to possess him, and, when the hour and the conversation were past, as suddenly to leave him. But, while that hour lasted, there was only one word for Stephen Phillips, poet, and that word was Genius.¹⁸

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18. Quoted from Kernahan's, In Good Company, pp. 145-148.

Chapter Two.

Diction.

"Only by music am I free,
In music find wings."

Music and the Woman's Soul
Lines 13 - 14.

Chapter Two.

Diction. Part I.

Poetry is language; it is the speech of every day with its harshness, its discords, its breaks and jerks, or as Coleridge describes it, "its abruptness, petty obstacles, discordant flats and sharps".¹ Yet, Mr. Phillips, the poet, works with his everyday language as with a plastic power; with an artistic sense of beauty of sound, he makes a choice of words; he fashions and modulates and sets the syllables lilting in measured cadences, and tunes them into the music of verse. Poetry cannot ignore that power of producing beautiful effects which language possesses when it uses the resources of music.

Mr. Phillips has qualities out of which the very essence of poetry is wrought. He is sensitive, with fibers that respond quickly to the pity and the passion of the world; he is thoughtful, curious for certain subtleties of thought, ready for philosophy; he has a feeling for style which is impressive as being of natural growth, rather than painfully acquired; and above all, he takes his art seriously. His heart is attuned to the beauty and the meaning of things, and to those who have ears to hear he will endeavor to interpret that beauty and that meaning. Mr. Phillips

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1. Quoted from Stephen J. Brown's "The Realm of Poetry," p. 35.

has found a music of his own and with that melody he has given none but his true impressions of the harmonies and of the discords of life. That singular instinct for the right word, so characteristic of him at his best, helps him to create the music and to flash the picture time after time upon our consciousness.

A majestic sweep of music is created by the combination of instruments that make up a symphony orchestra; the conductor is dependent upon and must keep under his control every instrument. Every word in poetry is likened unto an instrument - it has its own quality, its own peculiar tone and its own part to play; and when it is used it blends into the harmony of the whole with its peculiar coloring. Under the baton of a master poet words arrange themselves in rhythmic order and create music for the heart and for the soul.

The adjective is not the king of word instruments, it has a more enticing melody to play, a tone that creates color and charm; indeed, the adjective betrays all whom its music beguiles. The talents of the adjectives are four: they have sound, meaning, decorative value, and emotional value. The poet harmonizes as many of the four as he can. So it is with Mr. Phillips.

This word study of Mr. Phillips's music has been a fascinating one. Through out the melodies there is a rich strain of adjectives; perhaps this strain has not

been as prominent as those employed by other poets, but it has been melodious. The adjectives are there in splendid array.

A peculiarity of the position of many of his adjectives has caught the attention. Time after time, in his poems, the adjective succeeds the noun which it modifies rather than precedes it. It seems something like an after-beat. Here is an example selected at random:

"The days upon that human spirit dear
Fell; and existence lean, in sky dead gray,"²

This, however, is not the case in his plays, as the adjectives most commonly takes its usual position.

During this study of words, of their connotation, of their symbolism and the company they keep, one finds that Mr. Phillips is inclined to exploit the two words - beautiful and sweet.

In no other poem is the word "beautiful" brought to its fullest use as in "Marpessa". Mr. Phillips gives the word only three times in "Christ in Hades" and twice in "The Woman with the Dead Soul". But it is very characteristic of Stephen Phillips through out his poems and plays.

A "sweet" strain pervades all of Mr. Phillips's works, perhaps it is more obvious than the "beautiful". "Sweet" is everywhere in English poetry; it is everywhere in Mr. Phillips's poetry. This was Shakespeare's favorite

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adjective; gradually the beauty has begun to wane, the enchantment to abate, and now it is even "sentimental". Yes, it was Shakespeare's favorite adjective; it surely is Stephen Phillips's most used adjective, hence, his favorite.

Through out "Marpessa" it has been employed thirteen times, and of the thirteen, eight are concerning Marpessa herself:

"Her mortal sweetness"³

"Thee God created but to grow, not strive
And not suffer, merely to be sweet".⁴

Idas compares her thus:

" ... I love thee then
Not only for thy body packed with sweet
Of all this world, that cup of brimming June,
That jar of violet wine set in the air,
That palest rose sweet in the night of life";⁵

Here is a somewhat sentimental use of the word - "the body packed with sweet of all the world", and a symbolic suggestion of a pale, sweet rose giving forth its fragrance in the calm of night.

We have an echo of the thought of Apollo in "the sweetest surgery of the mind", and again later in Marpessa's speech:

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3. Stephen Phillips, Poems, p. 9, line 6.

4. Ibid., p. 11, line 11.

5. Ibid., p. 16, lines 2 - 6.

"Yet shall I irresistibly be kind,
Helplessly sweet, a wandering garden bliss."⁶

The last line expresses fittingly the purpose Apollo would have her fulfill in life - to be "helplessly sweet"!

It seems that a more fitting adjective would be found for this line in which "sweet" occurs:

"And thou, beautiful god, in that far time,
When in thy setting sweet thou gazest down".⁷

One wonders about the meaning of "sweet" in this line of "Christ in Hades":

"So the excluded ghosts in Hades felt
A waft of early sweet, and heard the rain".⁸

The word "sweet" is used in much the same manner in the play "Paolo and Francesca" as in "Marpessa". It has the same tone vibrating through its meaning. The youth, Paolo, struggles with his love for the pure Francesca; he feels that he cannot leave her - yet he must.

"Ah! can you think it is not sweet to breathe
That delicate air and flowery sigh of you".⁹

Again, he struggles, but in vain:

"I am by music led into this room,
And beckoned sweetly "¹⁰

And yet again:

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6. Stephen Phillips, Poems, p. 21, lines 14 - 15.

7. Ibid., p. 29, lines 21 - 2.

8. Ibid., p. 86, lines 6 - 7.

9. Stephen Phillips, Paolo and Francesca, p. 40, lines 2 - 3.

10. Ibid., p. 107, lines 15 - 16.

"And from thy mortal sweetness fled away,"¹¹

Paolo's voice is like a bit of music to Francesca:

"Why did he
Speak? The sweet sound has floated to my brain."¹²

...

"O voice too sweet!"¹³

It seems that the words of "Herod" sweep along too majestically and dramatically to give much attention to the subtelties of "sweet". Only three or four times does the word occur in the play. Twice it is used in a sarcastic sense when Herod's mother and sister plot against the lovely Marianne:

"Slow sweetness with more exquisite a pang."¹⁴

...

"Could she have drawn him, swooning at her
sweetness."¹⁵

And thus we leave "sweet" with the note that Mr. Phillips places more emphasis upon its music in his poems than in his plays.

"Lovely" is a far more personal word than "beautiful"; in fact, it preserves the meanings of "amorous", "loving", "lovable". "Lovely", one might say, is more poetical than

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11. Stephen Phillips, Paolo and Francesca, p. 109, line 2.

12. Ibid., p. 106, lines 15-16.

13. Ibid., p. 109, line 8.

14. Stephen Phillips, Herod, p. 91, line 13.

15. Ibid., p. 92, line 6.

"beautiful". It is true that the double 'L' in 'lovely' invites certain effects that 'beautiful' cannot give. Rylands says that the words 'lovely' and 'loveliness' are more frequent in poetry than 'beauty' and 'beautiful'.¹⁶ Not so, with Stephen Phillips. 'Beautiful' is his favorite of the two, while 'lovely' is very rare; only occasionally is it found in any of his works.

Coloring the music with their own delicate tones we find sensuous adjectives playing hither and yon through Mr. Phillips's poetry. By sensuous adjectives are meant "those which appeal to the eye and ear, the touch and taste and smell: soft, tender, perfumed, bright, radiant, shining, sweet, silent, musical, cool. 'Sweet' links up the sensuous with the general epithet, such as lovely, amorous, precious, fair, young, glorious, and beautiful. Poetry also favors among the synonyms of beautiful those of an intangible order, frail, faint, dim, shadowy, pale, wan."¹⁷ All of these synonyms are present in Mr. Phillips's works, each contributing to the harmony of feeling and language.

Some of the decorative adjectives, which Mr. Phillips scatters delicately through his poetry, will be considered. The word "green" has a subtle value; it has almost a symbolic significance with its suggestion of freshness and restful beauty. These undertones created by

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16. George H. W. Rylands, Words and Poetry, p. 102.

17. Ibid., p. 100.

"green" are by no means rare in Mr. Phillips's musical lays. He speaks of "darkness that we feel is green", "the greenly-silent night", "green illumined grass", "glorying green", "that greener green", "green waves", "the green of some receding shore", - these are just a few examples taken at random from his poems and plays.

Intertwining strands of color produce rich effects and pictorial scenes: "violet sea", "golden shuttle and violet wool", "white Calypso", "glassy ocean's azure swoon", "silvery dream", "crimson lips"; "purple earthly light", "bright fire", "bright wine", "galden glory", "purple robe", "burning torches", "glimmering pearl", "bright starlight", "emerald and ruby spark", "blue deep hour", "cloudy tinge", "violet wine".

Colorful nouns and adjectives parade in magnificent array through "Herod" and "Hero", thus adding their tones to the oriental atmosphere. "Paolo and Francesca" lacks this profusion of color words; words of a softer pitch pervade this masterpiece. The same is true of most of his poems; in them we find words of feeling more prominent than the dazzling color tones.

By his continued use of them, Mr. Phillips shows his fondness for a number of words and phrases such as magnificent, world, death, glory mad, burn and thunder. It has been the comment of critics that Mr. Phillips has a too abundant supply of "magnificents", that a plethoric use of the word tends toward rhetoric instead of poetry. The

same may be said of his use of "blood" and "burn". These words literally color all of his plays. The plays "Nero" and "Herod" are noted for their "madness."

Poetry employs a vivid image, a concrete instance to express a universal idea. It symbolizes: it creates idealistic imagery. "The poet names those objects which have in the past excited the delight, the desire, the envy, the allegiance of man; those objects of which to think is to fasten the hand upon the heart."¹⁸ Mr. Phillips is, in this sense, a poet of idealistic imagery. He symbolizes many things that are dear to the heart of man.

Nature in all her beauty becomes a motif of powerful cadences in Mr. Phillips's poetry. The author of the following lines has surely seen deep into nature's heart:

"When as a child I watched the sun recede
Firing the peaceful vales and mountain peaks,
And some eternal longing came on me
To flee away and up! as over crag
And piney headland slow the eagle soared,
And past me sailed the crane to other shores."¹⁹

'Summer' is a word which has in the past excited the delight of man and thus it is used, by the poet, as an image of perfection. Mr. Phillips creates an atmosphere of idealism by his use of the terms 'summer', 'summer night', 'summer day'.

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18. George H. W. Rylands, Words and Poetry, p. 58.

19. Stephen Phillips, Faust, p. 9, lines 1 - 6.

Here, too, Spring is symbolical of all the beauty and perfection that nature can offer to humanity. The reader feels the soft, moist breezes in these lines of "Christ in Hades":

"So the excluded ghosts in Hades felt
A waft of early sweet, and heard the rain
Of Spring beginning over them; they all
Stood still, and in each others' faces looked."20

And:

"... Ah, through all my veins
The sharpness of spring returns: I hear
The stalk revive with sap, and the first drops
Of green illumined grass; now over me
The blades are growing fast; I cannot rest."21

Yes, it is Spring-time:

"It is the time of tender, opening things.
Above my head the fields murmur and wave,
And breezes are just moving the clear heat.
O the mid-moon is trembling on the corn,
On cattle calm, and trees in perfect sleep.
And hast thou empty come? Has thou not brought
Even a blossom with the voice of rain
And the smell of earth about it, that we all
Might gather round and whisper over it?

...

... O speak to me
Of the blue moon, of breezes and of rivers!"22

Pastoral beauty to Mr. Phillips, as to other poets, is symbolic of peace and serenity, both of mind and of life. A rustic life of contentment and happiness is one which Marpessa and Idas will enjoy:

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20. Stephen Phillips, Poems, p. 84, lines 6 - 9.

21. Ibid., p. 85, lines 6 - 10.

22. Ibid., p. 87, lines 2 - 10; p. 88, lines 3 - 4.

The richness of the rose! But one wonders if he meant that the rose has no purpose in life? Surely not, for in the poem "The Woman and the Flower", he recognizes the value of the flower and humanity's hunger for its loveliness and fragrance.

"I came into a garret where one lay
A woman dying: round her children starved
And piteously entreated her for bread.
Her husband in the tavern drank and sang.
Scarcely could she speak, but on the
 coverlid
The veined hand a wild flower held and
 clasped.
I spoke to her of help, of life restored,
Of hunger satisfied: she answered me:
"The hunger that I have is for the flower;
A deeper hunger than for any food.
Why was I given this in my life so late?
I did not know such things were in the world.
Its color kills me and the scent it gives.
I could not rise up in this weary world
Again, "I have seen this and I long to go
After it, follow it somewhere thr' the dark.
So soft, so bright it claims me: let me die."
That night she died; the stumbling husband found
Her cold, but in her hand fixed was the flower."²⁷

Mr. Phillips has a fondness for the lily; he makes this flower very symbolic in its purity and in its beauty. The poem "The Lily" gives us a personal picture of the poet as he traversed a 'dark garden with frail souls for flowers'. There some poppy had been a 'dreamer frail', a rose was a 'passionate Eastern queen', but the lily - the lily 'so strangely silent and so white' had been his love!

In "Marpessa" we have a pretty picture:

"The summer day, was at her blue deep hour
Of lilies musical with busy bliss."²⁸

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27. Stephen Phillips, Lyrics and Dramas, p. 35.

28. Stephen Phillips, Poems, p. 9, lines 11-12.

How pictorial and colorful, this contrast between the deep blue of the sky, and the purity, and waxiness of the lily.

Roses, to the poet, are symbolic of love, lilies of death:

"Roses bring me to our love,
But lilies to the dead,
White flowers to the breathless give,
To the breathing, red.

Yet soon the breathing shall be cold
And earn the purer flower,
The lily hath immortal lease,
The rose an hour."²⁹

One believes that Mr. Phillips's fondness for flowers is genuine as he has strewn them lovingly through his poetry - plays and poems.

Gardens, islands, the sea possess in varying degrees and with slightly different implications an emotional value. A garden carries with it the suggestion of Eden, of "an old-fashioned garden", of the fragrance of flowers, graveled paths and the humming of bees. Mr. Phillips speaks occasionally of gardens, but not often.

Though this poet uses the atmosphere of a garden very little, he conjures up powerful visual pictures with the word "island". "Isles", and "islands" are intriguing to the imagination, they suggest remoteness - the Hebrid Isles, the South Seas - the warmth and color of the Mediterranean and the Isles of Greece. Something of the

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bewitching influence of "isle" is held in these lines:

"Calypso this long while
Detains him in her languorous ocean-isle."³⁰

and:

"Release him, sire, from soft Calypso's wile,
And dreamy bondage on the Witching Isle."³¹

The enchantment of far-away islands is felt by Penelope as her heart is wrung by anguish for her husband:

"Or dost thou live, and art with magic held
By some strange woman on a lone sea-isle?"³²

and again:

"Break at last the magic of this isle."³³

Fancy is increased by the remoteness as felt in this line in "Marpessa", as Apollo

"Smiled as on his favorite western isle"³⁴

Far in the West? Where? We know not and in fact we would rather not give to that "favorite western isle", "a local habitation and a name"!

Another example of the same magic allurements:

"Lure of the sinking sun, into undreamed
islands
Fortunate, far in the West"³⁵

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30. Stephen Phillips, Ulysses, p. 17, lines 13 - 14.

31. Ibid., p. 18, lines 3 - 4.

32. Ibid., p. 48, lines 3 - 4.

33. Ibid., p. 69, line 14.

34. Stephen Phillips, Poems, p. 10, line 14.

35. Stephen Phillips, Lyrics and Dramas, p. 1, lines 5 - 6.

Through out the centuries another child of Nature has captivated the imagination of the poets and will, doubtless, continue to do so until Eternity. There is a profound mystery, an awfulness and a sublimity surrounding the sea that appeals to the poet's soul; there is a call that cannot go unanswered; once the love for the sea creeps into the blood, there is nothing that can quiet its throbbing insistence. Stephen Phillips loved the sea. After the death of his child, the alluring attraction of the sea increased; in a strange and unseen manner it would heal his wounded mind with its deep resounding music. He sought the influence of the sea and gloried in the wide expanse of strength and wisdom that it brought.

The echoes of the sea resound through out his poems and plays; and something of the melody of the waves has found its way into his lines. We are aware of his love for the sea - that lure

"Of the sea, that soul of a poet a-yearn
for expression,
Forever yearning in vain!"³⁶

In vivid strokes, "By the Sea," presents pictures of the allurements, of the romance of the shore:

"Remember, ah remember, how we walked
Together on the sea-cliff! You were come
From bathing in the ocean, and the sea
Was not yet dry upon your hair, together
We walked in the wet wind till we were far

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36. Stephen Phillips, Lyrics and Dramas, p. 2, lines 5 - 6.

From voices, even from the thoughts of men,
 Remember how on the warm beach we sat
 By the old barque, and in the smell of tar;
 While the full ocean on the pebbles dropped,
 And in our ears the intimate low wind
 Of noon, that breathing from some ancient place,
 Blew on us merest sleep and pungent youth."³⁷

Even in his love for the sea, Mr. Phillips does not allow us to forget the treachery of it, the awful power it possesses:

"When all the captains had won home,
 Was whirled about the wilderness of foam
 For the wind and wave had driven him evermore
 Mocked by the green of some receding shore."³⁸

Again:

"With tempest and a roaring wall of waves
 I fling him backward from the shore he craves."³⁹

And again Ulysses recognizes the fury of the elements, the deceptiveness and power:

"I am fooled by the old sea-magic"⁴⁰

Visions of green shores taunt the imaginations of sea-worn sailors - there is deception in the mirage.

Of the calmness, of the peace of the waters he speaks in "Midnight - 31st. of December 1900":

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37. Stephen Phillips, Poems, p. 50.

38. Stephen Phillips, Ulysses, p. 13, lines 4 - 7.

39. Ibid., p. 14, lines 5 - 6.

40. Ibid., p. 120, line 2.

"In that day shall ye walk to and fro on the
 sea without terror,
 And pace without fear the foam,
 As a field of the evening the Mediterranean
 lying,
 The Atlantic a lawn for your feet."⁴¹

Again, the serenity of the sea is symbolized in "The Quest of Edith": here there is an indescribable loveliness about the union which has been brought about by the sea:

"In one grave were they buried by the sea,
 Coming together, though in dust at last;
 And when the tide has turned, steadily flows
 Over and over them the English foam,
 The Sea permitting what the Church forbids."⁴²

Imagine the picture here painted - a homey scene, the old inn-kitchen, a blazing cheery fire, a companionable group of sailors with their jovial faces alight in the dancing gleams of the fire:

"Sea-faring men with their sea-weary eyes,
 Round the inn-fire tell of some foreign land;"⁴³

Contrast the genial atmosphere of the pleasant scene above with the magnificence of Herod's world with its newly planned harbor:

"Well, well, a harbor then for every nation
 Whereon shall ride the navies of the world.
 There vessels from the sunset shall unlode;
 The harbor one vast bosom shall become
 For towering galleons of the ocean weary;
 For driven things a place of rest."⁴⁴

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41. Stephen Phillips, New Poems, p. 38, lines 8 - 11.

42. Ibid., p. 63, lines 2 - 6.

43. Stephen Phillips, Poems, p. 20, lines 6 - 7.

44. Stephen Phillips, Herod, p. 106, line 14, p. 107, lines 1 - 5.

It is interesting to notice the many and various terms, the phrases Mr. Phillips uses to describe the sea. Each phrase connotes something different, something of color, something of emotion, something of power and something of the sublimity of the sea. He speaks of "the crested seas in streaming avalanche," "the violet sea," "magic shores", "the long sea-evenings", "Subjected seas", "sea-faring men with their sea-weary eyes", "sea-rumor", "the trembling sea", "as rain an ocean blear", "when the sea murmured again", "luminous ocean", "the sea is on the verge of speech", "sea-tossed heroes laboring toward the West", "I pine at long sea-glances for a single sail", "Ocean uncharmed hither and thither mutinously swayed", "shoreless seas and fathomless deeps".

As a companion of the sea are the sails - a human touch deeply inlaid with beauty and delight. The sails of a ship present a picturesque scene as they glide over the blue and vanish into the horizon:

"O set the sails, for Troy, for Troy is fallen,
And Helen cometh home;
O set the sails, and all the Phrygian winds
Breathe us across the foam!
O set the sails unto the golden West!"⁴⁵

For Penelope there is sorrow, there is a desire for a glimpse of a sail, but:

"Never for me that sail on the sea-line
Never a sound of oars beneath the moon"⁴⁶

.....

45. Stephen Phillips, Ulysses, p. 41, lines 8 - 12.

46. Ibid., p. 42, lines 7 - 8.

What a wealth of metaphors, of picturesque word scenes, what intertwining strands of color fill the poem "The Doom of Sails" with associations that gladden the heart. Association with the imagination in such lines as these:

"Purple sails of the heroes lured to the Westward,
 Spread for the golden isles!
 Sails of a magic foam with faery plunder,
 Wafting the wizard gold!
 Sails of the morning, come like ghosts on the
 sea-line,
 With mid-night load of the deep!
 Sails of the sunset, red over endless waters,
 For the furthest Orient filled!"⁴⁷

Yet there is a melancholy tone running like a chord of soft, sorrowful music through the poem. Lines like these bring a longing for what has been:

"Alas! must ye utterly vanish, and cease
 from amidst us,
 Sails of the olden sea?

...

Sails of the starlight, passing we know not
 whither,

Silent, lighted, and lone!

...

Alas! must ye go as a dream, and depart as
 a vision,
 Sails of the olden sea?"⁴⁸

Notice the words which produce a feeling of sadness and melancholy; alas, vanish, silent, lone. What associations we have with dreams! Lovely things that have been are the

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47. Stephen Phillips, Lyrics and Dramas, p. 53, lines 5 - 12.

48. Ibid., p. 53, lines 1 - 2, 13 - 14, p. 54, lines 7 - 8.

fabrication of dreams - alas, are they gone? Whither?

No one knows. Only the memory remains.

The repetition of the line "Sails of the olden sea" is at once rich in effect and falls as sweet music upon the ears. Repetition is a far more usual device in poetry than the ordinary reader is aware of. Not only are certain words the current coin of poetry, whose stamp becomes little defaced by time, but also the same word appears and reappears in a single poem or passage. The word "sails" recurs again in a very effective manner.

The moon silvers the pages of Mr. Phillips's works. What is her poetic significance and value? The simple and elementary value of the moon is as something beautiful in itself, and therefore a poetic subject of which the general association is with romance and love.

" When the moon
Peeps through her lattice - that's love's
fitting hour." 49

The associations of the moon contradict each other in a paradoxical way which is the secret of these effects. She is at once the symbol of love and romance, and of inconsistency and loveliness. Here, the moon is symbolic of lost youth and love and of present loveliness:

"O thou full moon, whom I so many a night
Have watched ascending! Would that thou
didst gaze
For the last time upon my trouble! Ah,

.....

If now no longer stifling amid books,
I in thine argent twilight floated free!"⁵⁰

Not only is the moon a symbol of romance, and the suggestion aroused, emotional as in:

"Sing, minstrel, sing us a tender song
Of meeting and parting, with the moon in it."⁵¹

but also, it sometimes stirs the emotion of sadness and melancholy:

"The mourner is the favorite of the moon"⁵²

and:

"Out of our sadness have we made this world
So beautiful; the sea sighs in our brain,
And in our heart that yearning of the moon."⁵³

again:

"A clouded moon was on the Field of Blood"⁵⁴

The poem "Endymion" personified the moon, "this poem of the dreamer, whose lips have been touched by the lovely, barren spirit of night's beauty; by the cold orb that sheds not life but repose, not light but mystery. If there is sunlight there must be moonshine; if joy there must be sorrow; and when the moon stoops to earth for love, the ocean, unswayed by her, rushes from its limits. And so - as Mr. Phillips reads the legend - Selene shines forever cold

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50. Stephen Phillips, Faust, p. 4, lines 2 - 6.

51. Stephen Phillips, Ulysses, p. 41, lines 5 - 6.

52. Stephen Phillips, Poems, p. 23, line 21.

53. Ibid., p. 24, lines 6 - 8.

54. Stephen Phillips, New Poems, p. 52, line 1.

and unwedded, and for those who are of her following there is no joy, but dreams: in dreams she kisses them; they are lonely, yet strangers to no sorrow or no joy; the grief with which she touches them is

" Magical distress,
Distant delicious trouble and new pain."55

Dreams are lovely fabrications: they come and soon they vanish, but they are exquisite qualities of cloudland in Mr. Phillips's poetry - for here they appear often. Memory vividly recalls the past. We sit and muse with eyes half closed, and lo! the dead past gives up its dead - dead no longer, but living with a sort of weird reality, as in the lyric "Dreams and the Dead":

"Dreams can bring me back the dead;
I with thee again may tread,
As of old with thee I walk,
Still in the olden garden talk.
Though so rich, the moments fly,
Pass they in futility.
Dull our thought, our speech is slow,
Over the earthly themes we go;
So natural both the moment seem,
And we as idle as the dream.
No news hast thou of heaven or hell,
I nothing from the earth to tell.
Sudden I wake! Thou art away!
And ah what worlds had I to say!"56

The theme of "music" captivated the poet. By him, music is made symbolic of freedom, as in "Herod":

"Music, O music! Now create a land
From lovely chords, that land where we would be;
Where life no longer jars, nor jolts, but glides;"57

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55. Living Age, CCXIV, Mar. 17, 1900, p. 668.

56. Stephen Phillips, Lyrics and Dramas, p. 81.

57. Stephen Phillips, Herod, p. 115, lines 1 - 3.

Freedom from the burdens of life! Freedom of the heart and mind! Music that makes us forget the weariness and the fever of life, that urges us to hold fast to faith and look not down, but up; a music that will lift our souls to God - this is the music which Mr. Phillips symbolizes:

IV.

"Only by music am I freed,
In melody find wings;
No written word of poetry
The mighty Spaces brings.

V.

Then Sirina far behind me lies,
The sun is long outsoared;
The Universe is but a sound,
Creation but a chord!

VI.

Here can I find my only flight,
Tread where Beethoven trod;
So am I raised, so am I reft,
And lose myself in God!"⁵⁸

In oriental poetry, precious stones provide images of desire and of richness, and the usage came to English poets through the Bible, particularly the Song of Solomon. And so, Mr. Phillips carries over in his plays "Herod" and "Nero" the richness of an Oriental court, the air of luxury and ease. Very deftly does he weave into his stories the lavish bestowal of jewels and of vast treasures; here are dazzling word pictures

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58. Stephen Phillips, Lyrics and Dramas, p. 58.

of oriental magnificence. In the telling of his design King Herod seems to pour forth the precious jewels:

"And now that in my coffers 'gins to pour
Peal of barbaric kings and savage gold,
And emeralds of Indian emperors,
And wafted ivory in silent night,
And floated marble in the moon-beams, now
That the green waves are glooming pearls for me,
And metals, cry to me to be deliver'd,
And screened jewels wait like brides, I'll have
No stint - "59

again:

"I dreamed last night of a dome of beaten gold
To be a counter-glory to the sun.

...

And I will think in gold and dream in silver,
Imagine in marble and in bronze conceive,
Till it shall dazzle pilgrim nations"60

and again:

"That bag of emeralds give it to me - so:
And yonder sack of rubies; I will gaze
On glittering things."61

All of this richness is one method by which the dramatist creates an Oriental atmosphere. Nowhere in all his poetry does Mr. Phillips give himself so completely to the lavishness of imagery through the medium of precious stones and metals. These are his plays of Oriental significance and these alone require the magnificence of background and the luxuriant display of "glittering things."

Light and darkness - this is one of the most elemental facts in human existence, perhaps the first which our exnscious-

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59. Stephen Phillips, Herod, p. 106, lines 1 - 9.

60. Ibid., p. 111, lines 5 - 6; 14 - 17.

61. Ibid., p. 112, lines 2 - 3.

ness grasps. "Let there be light and there was light" is sublime! The division into light and darkness is a universal mystery and law. All words which suggest the one or the other will possess the power to shake us, to terrify us or make us rejoice. But further, light and darkness have always formed an analogy with life and death.

Through his poetry, Mr. Phillips makes use of this analogy, sometimes in a clear-cut fashion, sometimes very subtly. In "Marpessa", Apollo, the glorious god, presents his arguments to the adored object of his love; he appeals to her feeling of terror and her dread of death:

"Child, wilt thou taste of grief? On the
 the hours
 Shall feed, and bring thy soul into the
 dusk.
 Even now thy face is hasting to the dark!"⁶²

Here is the analogy of life and death, or the freshness of youth and the waning of life.

The relation between light and life, bright and beautiful, crops up in many different contexts and disguises. Light is symbolic of life as in this line:

"Till slowly with the gathering light, lo Life
 Came back on her."⁶³

Catch the undercurrent, a desire for light. Here is felt the full significance of a "candle" - a beam of warm light as it radiates in the dark world:

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62. Stephen Phillips, Poems, p. 11, lines 14 - 16.

63. Ibid., p. 38, lines 1-2.

"O beauty lone and like a candle clear
In this dark country of the world!"⁶⁴

The Creator of light is also the Creator of darkness, as in the poem "To Milton - Blind". This poem gives a pleasant contrast between light and darkness, as the night here is providential; the Creator deliberately gave darkness to this illustrious man for He realized that the brilliance may lure us from the Truth. To Milton was restored the privilege of the "virgin Dark"; to him was back "original night". It was the mind of a genius that conceived this thought.

In melancholy terms in "The New 'De Profundis'" the poet gives expression to the feeling that the soul is conscious of the gripping approach of darkness:

"Of darkness older than the light,
Of blackness gaining on the bright."⁶⁵

Remorse of the human soul haunts these lines; the sorrow of Orestes runs like a chord of sad music through them when he sees his mother dead:

"My Mother! ay, My Mother now; O hair
That once I play'd with in these halls!
O eyes
That for a moment knew me as I came,
And lighten'd up, and trembled into love;
The next were darkened by my hand!"⁶⁶

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64. Stephen Phillips, Poems, p. 17, lines 12 - 13.

65. Ibid., pp. 69, lines 7 - 8.

66. Stephen Phillips, New Poems, lines 2 - 6.

Through out Mr. Phillips's plays, the dramatic issues are greatly heightened by contrast. An atmosphere of gloom, of deep melancholy is more surely produced by the entrance of youth into the dark picture. Here is youth, which personified brightness, versus gloom and death.

Into the great and shadowy halls of Rimini comes a ray of purity, a beautiful maiden:

"She hath but wondered up at the white clouds;
Hath just spread out her hands to the warm sun."⁶⁷

The contrast is felt by Giovanni; he has a consciousness of the darkness and the new light:

"It seems, indeed,
That I am bringing into this dark air
A pureness that shall purge these ancient
halls."⁶⁸

And again:

"Ah, but a juice too pure hath now been
poured
In a dark ancient wine."⁶⁹

This fresh and lovely flower, Francesca, battles against the deadening atmosphere of the palace. Yes, the youth of her yearns for joy and laughter:

"But O, I have a fluttering up toward joy,
Lightness and laughter, and a need of singing."⁷⁰

What a marriage festival Giovanni would portray!

In a frenzy he proclaims the marriage ceremony when the funeral rites of the young lovers should be pronounced.

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67. Stephen Phillips, Paolo and Francesca, p. 15, lines 4 - 5.

68. Ibid., p. 22, lines 15 - 14; p. 23, line 1.

69. Ibid., p. 28, lines 5 - 6.

70. Ibid., p. 39, lines 9 - 10.

With the irony of the words, of the situation, the contrast between life and death is heightened:

"They shall be married before all men, Rita!
Rouse the house and bring in lights, lights,
lights!
There shall be music, feasting and dancing.
Wine shall be drunk. Candles, I say! More
lights!
More marriage lights! Where tarry they the
while,
The nuptial tapers? Rouse up all the house!"⁷¹

Later Giovanni goes to the litter whereon lie the dead - Paolo and Francesca; he bends over the bodies and kisses them on the forehead. He is shaken:

"She takes away my strength,
I did not know the dead could have such hair,
Hide them. They look like children fast asleep!"⁷²

What diction could hold more exquisite simplicity, more poignancy of feeling, more beauty!

Lisle, in "The Sin of David" knows his guilt; yes, he knows the consequence will be punishment, but why vengeance on the child? As his child is dying, Lisle challenges Death:

"Wilt thou revenge thee on bright curls and
cheeks,
And wilt thou lunge, grey swordsman, at a
babe?"⁷³

Hear Syllaëus as he accuses Herod:

"Herod, these sightless eyes can yet behold
The blood on you of young Aristobulus,
It is so bright, it dazzles even the blind."⁷⁴

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71. Stephen Phillips, Paolo and Francesca, p. 117, lines 8 - 13.

72. Ibid., p. 120, lines 6 - 8.

73. Stephen Phillips, The Sin of David, p. 110, lines 5 - 6.

74. Stephen Phillips, Herod, p. 79, lines 8 - 9; p. 80, line 1.

These lines are simple and direct, naked as ordinary speech, but heightened by the one word "dazzle", which suggests the intolerable brightness of blood.

The reader pities Herod, - Herod the magnificently robed but the poor in spirit - as he indulges in introspection. He is an object of contrasts:

"Oh! since my birth I have lived in fierce
contrast,
For ever half in lightening, half in gloom;
The brighter still the public brilliance glows,
The deeper falls the darkness of the hearth.
Never the calm and uneventful warmth
Where other men like creatures bask and
browse,
The metal of my mind attracts the tempest."⁷⁵

Ulysses struggles with the gods; he fears the descent into Hades - the place of death. Athene urges him on as this is his only hope of returning home:

"Athens: Thy native shore!
Ulysses: The darkness and the dead!
Athens: Thy warm fire-blaze!
Ulysses: The grave and all the grief!
Athens: Voice of thy wife!
Ulysses: That crying from the deep!"⁷⁶

While traversing the gloomy shadows of Hades, Ulysses pauses, he hears the wistful cries of children. Must innocent babes pass through the chill and damp of that great night?:

"Ulysses: Little bewildered ghosts in this
great night!
They flock about me -
Hermes: Wandering on their way
To banks of asphodel and spirit flowers.
Ulysses: Ah, a girl's face! A boy there with
bright hair!

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76. Stephen Phillips, Ulysses, p. 82, lines 2 - 7.

75. Stephen Phillips, Herod, p. 67, lines 8 - 13; p. 68, line 1.

He is newcome and is not listless yet.
 And thou dost make a little prattling noise
 And hast not learned to speak!
 A child: O the bright armour!
 Another: O, father, bring us to the place of
 flowers!
 Another: We have lost our way! Show us the
 grassy fields!"⁷⁷

Mr. Phillips is essentially a melancholy poet.

Through out his entire works, there is a strain of sad music that plays upon the heart strings of the reader. There is a certain kingdom - that of perfect sadness, a kingdom into which not many poets enter, and into which few readers have the heart to watch them go; and whither fewer have the heart to follow them. Mr. Phillips is one of these poets: "indeed he is a waster in this realm.

We turn to his lyrics for sadness unmingled and complete, beautiful by their very integrity. Wisely brief are these poems, for sadness is not for epic, nor for drama, nor for the sustained song. Sadness is less tolerable than impassioned tragedy, and one can endure it no longer than a lyric - while:

"She is not happy! It was noon;
 The sun fell on my head:
 And it was not an hour in which
 We think upon the dead.

She is not happy! I should know
 Her voice, much more her cry;
 And close beside me a great rose
 Had just begun to die.

.....

She is not happy! As I walked,
 Of her I was aware:
 She cried out, like a creature hurt,
 Close by me in the air."⁷⁸

One of the sad secrets of these strange poems seems to be the negative in their diction. "Not happy" in such a lyric is more than "it will make me mad" of Lady Macbeth. "Not happy" would be insignificant in a great tragedy like "Herod"; but it is most poignant in a little lyric.

And like these poems is the unnamed lyric in which the widower has read the mournful letter of his wife - even the letter mourning the death of their child - without pain. Mr. Phillips imagines the man unable to grieve again over the old griefs, but broken by a "hurried happy line" by chance preserved among the letters:

"A hurried happy line!
 A little jest, too slight for one so dead;
 This did I not endure:
 Then with a shuddering heart no more I read."⁷⁹

Obviously, Stephen Phillips has created characteristic and expressive lyric forms, whether rhymed or rhymless. In "Thoughts in a Meadow", in "Midnight - 31st of December 1900", in "Dawn and Loss" and many others he has spoken with an expressive singing tone, his own and underived.

Such is the expression and conception of "A Gleam" - lines spoken by a husband to a wife concerning a daughter dead: the reader wonders if this is not out of a personal experience.

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78. Stephen Phillips, Poems, p. 72.

79. Ibid., p. 81, lines 9 - 12.

How it is touched with poignancy of feeling:

"I shall know, ere the sun arises,
By a sudden stirring of thee,
Or blind slight touch in the dark,
Or face upturned in quivering dream,
That your heart, like mine, has gone home
in the hush to its dead."⁸⁰

The mists, the sorrowing echoes of our speech, the
cloudy passage of the sailing swan, the shadows of rippled
waters, the mysterious reflections of eternity remembered and
unascertainable, sing from the motion of his music:

"I came at dawn on a river, visited never,
Strange, yet unstrange,
For I could follow faithful the wind of that
river
Away to sea.

...

They played me music at midnight, never yet
heard by me;
Undeard, yet heard,
Ah, when?"⁸¹

It is one of the poems of his later printed volumes - one of
those quieter songs that seem to have the singing tone that
will carry farthest through mysterious space.

Because of their terseness and directness, which
make them imposing, Mr. Phillips's lyrics are among his best
works. In the volume "Lyrics and Dramas" there is found
"a unity of tragic mood, the mood of a man who confronts defeat

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80. Stephen Phillips, New Poems, p. 51, lines 4 - 8.

81. Stephen Phillips, Lyrics and Dramas, p. 14, lines 5 - 8; p.
15, lines 3 - 5.

with little hope and for whom the world's familiar things - the lights in the sky, the early song of birds, the beat of the sea - have become the haunting things. Defeat and loss are acknowledged, but life is not made to appear cheap and mean. There is nobility in these poems. For their maker, looking sadly on the world, sees it filled, not with deceptive and passing but with grave and permanent things."⁸²

Mr. Phillips has also a more realistic manner.

In "The Wife", a mental tragedy, and in "The Woman with the Dead Soul", a spiritual tragedy, he gives tragic studies in modern realism; yet the noble pity pervading them lifts them above the tawdriness and squalor of London life which they represent. One note of melodrama would have ruined the story of a woman starving in London with a little, hungry boy and an ill husband. In desperation she goes out into the evening to seek money as a street-walker. Returning in the night with the bread her wage has brought, she finds her husband dead.

It is interesting to compare the opinions of two critics concerning Mr. Phillips's realistic poems:

You have but to compare Mr. Henley's sonnets on London types with Mr. Phillips's London poems to see how this quality of humanity makes the younger man's

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82. New Republic, V (Dec. 25, 1915), pp. 193 - 194.

work so much more valuable than the other's. Each alike has a great gift for vividly catching a likeness, so to say, in a line or two; but the one seems to etch in vitriol with a cruel delight in the sordidness and deformity of his subjects, and the other, though even more forcibly and more realistically in tears.⁸³

But, for the moment, he seems to us confused with the spectacle he looks at - the glare of the gas-lamps blind him; we hear in his verses the roar of what he calls "the orchestral strand", but not any central melody; he has not set the life of London to any music, but only reproduced some of its discords. Yet he will find a music of his own we are confident, for in both his long poems of modern life - "The Wife" and "The Woman with the Dead Soul" there are passages which taken alone would almost justify our selection.⁸⁴

Stephen Phillips's most exquisite poem is "Marpessa". Marpessa, the mortal maiden must choose between her mortal lover, Idas, and her divine lover, Apollo. Each in turn pleads his cause. Apollo would assume Marpessa into the rhythm of the universe. Idas can offer no such splendid

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83. Bookman, XIII (March-August, 1901), p. 28.

84. Academy, LIII (Jan. 15, 1898), p. 47.

dowry; but he speaks the language of passionate human romance. Here Mr. Phillips touches his highest point of lyric rapture which is filled with the very spirit of poetry:

" I love thee then
Not only for thy body packed with sweet
Of all this world, that cup of brimming
June,
That jar of violet wine set in the air,
That palest rose sweet in the night of
life;"⁸⁵

This beauteous passage is too long to be quoted here. Very beautifully too, full of fine thought and fine feeling, is the long speech in which Marpessa makes her choice.

This poem is exquisite; its diction is perfect. Here Mr. Phillips has achieved an enviable style, and the style is his own, though it is colored with Tennyson's influence. "Life almost every artist, he came from a school, and there was no mistaking his master; but there was no mistaking, either, the disciple's originality. In each case the poet's imagination had been at work, adding beauty to what was beautiful already, reading, as Tennyson had done before him, a new significance into the old myth."⁸⁶

Very little of Mr. Phillips's later work reaches the level of "Marpessa" and "Christ in Hades". Rereading the latter poem, one is struck once again by its completeness and its rare poetical qualities. The verse, fully in keeping with its subject, has the Virgilian stateliness and the Virgilian simplicity.

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85. Stephen Phillips, Poems, p. 16, lines 2 - 6.

86. Living Age, CCXXIV (March 17, 1900), p. 668.

The poem "Christ in Hades" is a strange blending of Christian and Pagan myths; for the dead world which Jesus enters is rather Hades as Virgil pictured it than any realm of Dante's "Inferno". Proserpina sits enthroned there, and the thrill of Christ's coming is by her mistaken for the advent of Hermes, calling her to the upper world when the grain quickens in the ground. This new Orpheus checks Ixion's wheel, and stays the labor of Sisyphus; but as he advances through the realm of shadow, drawing the multitudes after him as he drew them on earth, one ghost meets him unreleased. Christ cannot free his antetype Prometheus, the other who took upon himself grief in full foreknowledge, suffering for the salvation of others; and the Titan speaks:

'O Christ, canst thou a nail move from
 these feet,
 Thou who art standing in such love of me?
 Thy hands are too like mine to undo these
 bonds.'

Thus the poet's imagination works, combining old things into new shapes, and Pagan myth and the Christian take color from the other; but the material wrought upon has been worked over by many masters. Everywhere in the poem there is evidence of strong imagination fed by memory and the thoughts of other men.⁸⁷

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87. Living Age, CCXXIV (March 17, 1900), p. 666.

But the poem is magnificent. Beautiful are the lines, almost muscular with reality; they are packed with dramatic imagination from end to end. Its chief beauty is that of dramatic truth.

Death, sadness, gloom, seem to be the very essence of his poems and dramas. His finest dramas are those in which an ancient story and an older world are used to exhibit such elemental impulses as still determine the common human lot. He could invest a human relationship, under circumstances essentially simple, though often overlaid by the pomp of the empire, with an air of devastating fate.

Diction. Part II.

This word study of Mr. Phillips's music has been a fascinating one. One noticeable feature about Mr. Phillips's compositions is their freedom from foreign words and expressions. Evidently, here is one playwright who is satisfied to use the English language exclusively. His thoughts are expressed in the purity of his own language. He uses neither dialect nor slang.

His diction, like his plays, is molded on classic lines. This classic dialogue may explain to some extent, the unrealistic effect his plays appear to have. The realistic type of dialogue which employs every day speech with its disconnected phrases and informality, places reality on the stage. But Mr. Phillips did not strive for realism on the stage as contemporary dramatists are doing; he presented poetic plays modeled after the classic type.

Mr. Phillips's diction is essentially English. In this fascinating study of word origins, almost 500 words which are characteristic of Stephen Phillips's compositions were placed under observation with this result: 234 are of English origin, 126 come from the Latin via the French; 20 are from Scandinavian; 16 come through French, Latin from Greek; 4 are Celtic, 3 are French-Old High German and 2 Old Low German. In a miscellaneous group there are a number

of languages represented such as French-Persian, Scandinavian-Lithuanian, Arabic, French-Teutonic, etc.

Some of his most characteristic words which have their origin in the English language are: again, away, alone, asleep, blood, bitter, bliss, book, brother, bright, burn, blaze, cold, cool, call, come, clasp, child, cling, dream, dawn, dark, deep, dim, deed, day, dread, drink, doom, earth, fear, friend, fear, fire, fight, forget, field, grave, great, give, God, green, good, glad, gloom, gold, heart, help, hair, home, hope, holy, hate, I, kiss, king, kingdom, life, love, live, little, light, lightning, laugh, look, linger, moon, must, mad, night, not, need, now, name, never, nothing, no, old, other, path, queen, quail, read, road, run, ready, rich, roam, red, sad, sleep, shadow, shade, sweet, sorrow, sea, soul, see, sing, soft, slay, strong, still, sorry, slow, star, sigh, so, strength, sword, sake, sob, stand, sure, son, sail, time, tear, twilight, thing, thought, tell, true, truth, they, thunder, tale, thank, thrill, terrible, tree, up, world, wind, woe, war, will, word, wonder, wondrous, white, wound, wander, weary, whisper, weep, watch, wealth, wild, water, wave, woman, youth, ye, yet.

A few of his characteristic words which come from the Latin through French are: ancient, art, ah, battle, beauty, beautiful, courage, cruel, cry, cause, close, charm, chance, change, cease, certain, city, duty, delight, difficulty, danger, disaster, escape, emperor, fate, foliage,

flower, flame, force, faint, face, faith, fancy, grief, glory, gentle, human, immortal, imagine, isle, ivory, joy, jewel, legend, loyal, large, mystery, mortal, marble, master, nature, pearl, pure, pain, pale, poor, pace, patient, palace, passion, plan, peace, pass, plot, praise, public, power, quest, ruin, remember, relief, rival, strange, sound, sudden, suffer, scent, soldier, secret, sin, superb, tremble, tender, turn, terror, terrible, vision, vengeance, voice.

A few of the characteristic words from the Scandinavian are: dazzle, gaze, glimmer, happy, hail, haste, ill, kill, low, rush, rash, show, struggle, smile, sky, tidings, whirl.

Some of the words which come from Greek, through the Latin and French are: air, agony, chime, ecstasy, hour, mystic, melancholy, music, ocean, pause, place, poem, poet, policy, purple, story, throne.

A few words of Latin origin are: anticipate, act, arrogance, commend, corrupt, candle, emotion, horror, infinite, magnificence, postpone, quiet, wine.

In a miscellaneous group of Mr. Phillips's characteristic words are found these language origins: brave, pool, pang, pretty - Celtic; dance, garden, robe - French-Old High German; boy, luck, - Old Low German; beguiled - English-French; breeze - French; crush, touch - French-Teutonic; lily - Latin-Greek; trick - Dutch; gay - French-Middle High German; scarlet - French-Persian; lure - French-German; rose - Latin-Greek-Arabic; brilliant - French-Latin-Arabic.

Mr. Phillips's entire compositions are principally of monosyllabic words. He shows himself to be the master of the one syllable word.

The following paragraphs show the predominance of monosyllable words. In the poem "Marpessa", there are over 2500 words, of which 1947 are one syllable, 455 two syllable, 103 three syllable, 18 four syllable and 4 five syllable words. "The Passing of Julian" a poem of 328 words contains 240 one syllable, 64 two syllable, 17 three syllable and 7 four syllable words.

Of the first 1000 words of "Paolo and Francesca" there are 841 one syllable, 116 two syllable, 38 three syllable, 3 four syllable, and 2 five syllable words. Of the last 500 words of "Herod", there are 380 one syllable, 95 two syllable, 20 three syllable, 4 four syllable, 5 five syllable words. Of the first 500 words of Act III of "Nero", there are 355 one syllable, 108 two syllable, 27 three syllable and 10 four syllable words. Of the last 500 words of Scene IV of "Armageddon" there are 409 one syllable, 78 two syllable, and 13 three syllable words.

As a summary, it is found that of the 5355 words taken from various compositions, 4172 words are of one syllable, 916 of two syllables, 218 of three syllables, 42 of four syllables and 7 of five syllables. Thus, it is seen that Mr. Phillips's style is overwhelmingly monosyllabic.

In connection with the length of words; it is interesting to note the phrases -the length of adjectives and nouns. As the long negative adjective and a one syllable noun are characteristic of Milton, the one and the two syllable adjective and the one syllable noun are characteristic of Stephen Phillips.

The poem "Endymion" abounds in phrases of adjective and noun. In these phrases, there are 91 adjectives of one syllable, 70 of two syllables, 19 of three syllables, 2 of four syllables and 1 of five syllables. In Act I of "Paolo and Francesca" there are 51 adjectives of one syllable, 48 of two syllables, 5 of three syllables, 1 of four syllables and 1 of five syllables; 47 nouns of one syllable, 13 of two syllables, and 6 of three syllables. Act I of "Herod" yields 130 adjectives of one syllable, 45 of two syllables, 12 of three syllables, 4 of four syllables and 2 of five syllables; 100 nouns of one syllable, 52 of two syllables, 4 of three syllables, 4 of four syllables, and 1 of five syllables. This test shows that the nouns are predominantly one syllable, the adjectives are both one and two syllable words.

Some characteristic examples of the noun and adjective combinations may be given: morning stream, secret glee, dewy thoughts, ancient wars, dark ancient wine, ancient woes,

midnight hour, golden hour, perfect sleep, summer moon, forest green, glorious pain, mortal woman, quiet singing, long looks, far far thoughts, spirits exquisite, what melancholy sweet, magical distress, argent soul, trembling immortality, sea-tossed heroes, juice too pure, long-ago farewell, dark air, far-off tears, public peril, red blood, general good, scarlet flowers, brief pain, a little little pain, utmost isles, yelling eagles, faint dawn, towered world, red sunset, such magnificence, dead body, last time, burning tale, deep waters.

The study of the length of Mr. Phillips's sentences has been an interesting one. Taking the first 50 sentences of "Marpessa", there is found to be a great variation in the number of words allotted to each. The longest contains 85 words; the shortest contains 4. In this test of 50 sentences, the average of words per sentence is 28.1; while the median falls between 23 and 24. A test of the first 50 sentences of "Christ in Hades" nets this result: an average of 18.52 words per sentence and a median of 15.

The sentences in the plays average much shorter than those in the poems. The first 100 sentences of "Herod" give an average of 8.38 words per sentence, with a median of 6. In the second series of 100 sentences of "Herod", the average is raised to 9.14 words, with a median falling between 6 and 7. Act III of Nero, the first 50 sentences raise the

average of words per sentence to 15.14, with a median of 13. The first 50 sentences of Scene II; Act IV of "Nero" lower the average to 9.4 with a median of 6. The last 50 sentences of "Paolo and Francesca" have an average of 7.06 words per sentence and a median of 5. Of the first 50 sentences of Scene IV of "Armageddon" there is an average of 7.8 words per sentence and a median of 5.

This chapter has been an attempt to bring out a few comparisons in diction between the poems and the plays of Mr. Phillips. The beauty of his poems has been found more enticing, more genuine than that of his dramas. The latter with two exceptions "Paolo and Francesca" and "Herod" seem conversational themes with no particularly distinctive diction. As a study of his dramas will be made in another chapter, there must not be a repetition of material. Therefore, here is a very brief resume of his dramas:

"Nero" is intermittently ablaze with melodramatic flare and wreathed in the smoke of rhetoric. The diction, as a whole, seems superficial.

"Ulysses" contains some very lovely word pictures, and a few lines of haunting melody; otherwise it is merely a kaleidoscopic extra.

"The Sin of David" presents a number of lines of severity common in Mr. Phillips's first plays, but even this severity of style is due to the Commonwealth setting.

"Faust" has some fine lines: some that portray the poet's love of nature quite beautifully. But there is nothing exceptional.

"Pietro of Siena" has fitful echoes of the poet's first and best play - nothing more.

But "Herod" is made of magnificent diction. The dramatic skeleton is unmistakably clothed in flesh and blood, uttering wonderful human speech.

It would be difficult to find an act in any English poetic play since the Elizabethans in which at once the dramatic interest is so keen and so subtly developed and the quality of the poetry so fine as the third act of Herod. The wonderful way in which the mad king's longings for his dead wife - whom he more than half believes dead and dares not quite half believe alive - is made to grow from moment to moment, while his courtiers seek to distract him into various ambitious plans for the good of his people, such as the building of the great Temple and the port at Caesarea... It is sumptuous language... It is no flattery of Mr. Phillips to say that Marlowe might have signed it with pride. Mr. Phillips has often been called "Miltonic." It is new to find him using Marlowe's drums and trumpets of barbaric pomp so grandly.⁸⁸

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88. Bookman, XIII (Mar. - Aug., 1900), p. 29.

"Paolo and Francesca" gives us some of the most exquisite harmonies in all of Mr. Phillips's music. Here the poet has chosen a theme of pure passion and has steeped it in an atmosphere of pure poetry, and here is an intimate blending of poetic sweetness with dramatic strength. It is brief, poignant, rapid, vital, never lingering for a moment over empty rhetoric; and its verse has a delicate music of its own. The last lines of this drama, in all their purity, in their simplicity and their loveliness are a fitting climax for this exquisite piece of music.

As a conclusion for the chapter, may there linger in the memory, cadences of sheer beauty from Mr. Phillips's poetry. In these rich metaphors there vibrate the imaginative vitality and the idyllic genius of a poet.

"The air glows now like moonlight in a
forest,
I see a dreaming ocean and new shores." 89

" - Can any tell
How sorrow first doth come? Is there a step,
A light step, or a dreamy drip of oars?
Is there a stirring of leaves, or ruffle
of wings?
For it seems to me that softly, without
hand,
Surely she touches me." 90

"The breaking of a sea whose waves are souls
That break upon a human-crying beach." 91

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89. Stephen Phillips, Faust, p. 7, lines 14 - 16.

90. Stephen Phillips, Paola and Francesca, p. 42, lines 11 - 16.

91. Stephen Phillips, Nero, p. 43, lines 12 - 13.

"Pour out my heart like treasure at your feet.

...

With brooding music over noontide moss,
And low dirge of the lily-swinging bee, -
Then stars like opening eyes on closing flowers." 92

"And poplars shivering in a silvery dream." 93

"About thee is the sound of rushing wings
And a breathing as of angels thro' thy hair." 94

"Thy hand was taken by angels who patrol
The evening, or are sentries to the dawn." 95

" With a highway of glass and of gold,
With life of a colored peace and a lucid
leisure" 96

"Make me Thy athlete even in my bed,
Thy girded runner tho' the course be sped." 97

" Launcelot
Who burned in sudden steel like a blue flame" 98

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92. Stephen Phillips, Ulysses, p. 65, lines 8 - 13.

93. Ibid., p. 50, line 7.

94. Stephen Phillips, Herod, p. 20, lines 3 - 4.

95. Stephen Phillips, Poems, p. 44, lines 9 - 10.

96. Stephen Phillips, New Poems, p. 31, lines 1-2.

97. Ibid., p. 43, lines 3 - 4.

98. Ibid., p. 105, lines 6 - 7.

" Who shall set a shore to love"99

" Day in a breathless passion kisses night."100

"Tongue that alone in Milton could uphold
That lyre of thunder and the trump of gold"101

"But this we feel, when thou hadst crossed the
bar
The pilot of thy music was not far."102

"Tip-toe upon some primrose bank of time
Thrilled with strange scents, with golden
ardors fired,
Ready for the revelation of life."103

"Thou art the mighty candle of the world,"104

"At times she seemed the vision of the East
Made flesh; of gold beginnings of the world,
When first the sun sprang and the seas uplift."105

"That's ended like a song."106

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99. Stephen Phillips, Paola and Francesca, p. 48, line 10.

100. Ibid., p. 82, line 10.

101. Stephen Phillips, Panama and Other Poems, p. 33, lines 15 - 16.

102. Ibid., p. 34, lines 17 - 18.

103. Ibid., p. 43, lines 12 - 14.

104. Ibid., p. 106, line 6.

105. Ibid., p. 116, lines 11 - 13.

106. Stephen Phillips, Ulysses, p. 60, line 11.

Chapter Three.

Versification

"Music, O music! Now create a land
From lovely chords, that land where we would be."

Herod Act III, Lines 280-281.

Versification

Poetry is written song, and cannot without helying its nature, wholly forget that it sprang from music. Though the music be silent, the verse never forgets it. There is a deep reason for the appeal of meter to the aesthetic side of humanity. "It lies in the fact that a metrical form is a pattern to which the poet conforms in the main while overlaying it or disguising it with endless variations. The reader's pleasure arises in part from the feeling of a difficulty ever present and ever skilfully overcome, in part from the sense of variety in unity or of symmetry in variety - variety of the poet's rhythms embroidered upon his uniform pattern of meter. And such pleasure, for those whose ears are well attuned, is increased when the poet pushes his variations as far as he dare without breaking away wholly from the type."¹

This chapter is a study of written song as Mr. Stephen Phillips has composed it. The poet, with an artistic sense of beauty of sound and of rhythm, has made a choice of word instruments, he has fashioned and modulated and set the syllables lilting in measured cadences, and has tuned them to the music of verse.

His verse at its best, especially his blank verse, which will be studied later in the chapter, carries a full volume of imaginative meaning, moves with a majestic motion, and contains a rich variety of pause and cadence, sustained

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1. Stephen J. Brown, The Realm of Poetry, p. 36.

and inspired like the verse of all genuine masters, from within.

A striking charm in Stephen Phillips's poetry is his mastery of the peculiar values of the sound of English. The poet's admirable use of assonance, his sense of subtle changes in tone, must always be a keen pleasure to readers of poetry.

"Lyric I" in the volume "Poems", is a lovely example of assonance. The note of melancholy and the feeling of sadness are produced by the choice of words which contain the a and the long o sounds.

"O to recall!	ō	ä	
What to recall?	ä	ä	
All the roses under snow?	ä	ō	ā
Not these.	ö	ē	
Stars that toward the waters go?	ä	ä	ō
Not these." ²	ö	ē	

The sighing sounds of o and a stir the emotion of sadness.

Poignant grief is expressed by the prevailing vowel sounds of the long e, the long i and the oo:

"I lack thee in the noonday light,	ī	ä	ē	oo	ī
I want thee in the deep of night,	ī	ä	ē	ē	ī
But most, when sadder than all words,	ō	ä	ä	ō	
I hear the voice of waking birds.	ī	ē	io	ā	

.....

...

O dear wert thou in silent dew ō ī ū

Thrice dear in deepening of the blue ī ē ōō

But now I see from this dark room ī ē ä ōō

Only the glimmer of a tomb."³ ō ī ī ōō

Sadness is paramount in the poem "To a Lost Love".

The sadness, too, is produced, in part, by the play upon the long vowels, particularly:

"I cannot look upon thy grave, ī ä ö öö ö ī ā

Though there the rose is sweet,³ ō ō ē

Better to hear the long wave wash ē ö ā ä

These wastes about my feet!"⁴ ē ā ou ī ē

The device of assonance is carried over into his dramatic poetry; in fact, it is as characteristic of his dramas as of his lyrics and personal poems. Here are a few examples chosen from the plays:

"This odorous amorous isle of violets."⁵

"

"With brooding music over noontide moss."⁶

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3. Stephen Phillips, Lyrics and Dramas, p. 24, lines 1 - 4; p. 25, lines 5 - 8.

4. Stephen Phillips, New Poems, p. 97, lines 1 - 4.

5. Stephen Phillips, Ulysses, p. 65, line 9.

6. Ibid., p. 65, line 11.

"Ogre and witch and dreadful swoop of winds."⁷

"I am an old, old man! am long forgotten."⁸

"That smile hath made a mist of all the world"⁹

"The stealing May and mystery of your spirit"¹⁰

"May God send down on him His glory of old,"¹¹

" and there the moon
Shall aim all night her argent archery."¹²

"Melodious axes ring through Lebanon"¹³

One fetter with which Mr. Phillips binds his words together is the device of alliteration. Stephen Phillips has developed its resources. He does not confine himself to the repetition of initial consonants; he uses a consonant at the beginning of one word and repeats it in the middle of the

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7. Stephen Phillips, Ulysses, p. 80, line 14.

8. Ibid., p. 85, line 4.

9. Stephen Phillips, Sin of David, p. 78, line 10.

10. Stephen Phillips, Paola and Francesca, p. 40, line 4.

11. Stephen Phillips, Herod, p. 19, line 9.

12. Ibid., p. 111, lines 8 - 9.

13. Ibid., p. 113, line 3.

next, or in the middle of one word and at the end of another. Again, "instead of repeating the same consonant he echoes it by a consonant of the same class: d and f, p and b, f and v, answer one another at intervals.

In "Lyric I" the play is principally upon the letter t, r, and l. Here the reader gets the feeling of the rolling R and its music like water trickling over stones.

While the alliterative scheme in "Lyric I" is patterned on the letters F, R and L, notice the play upon S in the lyric "The Doom of Sails". The art of poetry, according to Rylands, consists in knowing exactly how to manipulate the letter S.¹⁴

l, l "Alas! must ye utterly vanish, and cease
v-f, d-t from amidst us. s,s,sh,c,s,s,s.

l,d Sails of the olden sea, s,s,s.

...

l,l Sails of the morning, came like ghosts on the
m,n,n,m,n sea-line, s,s,s,s,s.

m,l,d,t,d With midnight load of the deep!

l,t,t,d,d,t,l Sails of the sunset, red over endless
f,v waters"¹⁵ s,s,s,s,s,s,s.

The S's appear in great numbers but are leavened with other letters - the d's, and t's, the m's and l's heighten the music of the S's with their undertones. The first two lines

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14. Rylands, George H. W., Words and Poetry, p. 40.

15. Stephen Phillips, Lyrics and Dramas, p. 53, lines 1 - 2, 9 - 11.

and the last two lines of the poem, which are nearly the same, have three strong pauses which draw out the seven S's like a breeze touching lovingly the sails that are vanishing.

In these lines from "England and Rome" alliterative schemes are used:

"Rome reeled and fell; she rotted from within,
Languid by luxury, by vice exposed;
We are not sunk into that sensual slush.
Yet who shall say; if on the final clash,
And all this potent people half-adream,
Apathy prove not an Imperial vice?"¹⁶

The first line rolls with the sound of r; the second lolls with the sound of l; the third hisses with the ss, and the last two are softened with the p.

Mr. Phillips has written two of his studies in modern realism, "The Wife" and "The Woman with the Dead Soul" in one of the least used measures of the day - the heroic couplet.

"She turned her eyes on me; they had no ray,
But stared like windows in the peer of day!"¹⁷

"Cold, yet so busy; though so nimble, dead;
Whose fingers ever at the sewing sped."¹⁸

"Toward her I leaned, and 'O my sister!' cried
'My sister!' but my hand she put aside,
Lest I her decent dress might disarray,
And so smiled on me that I might not stay."¹⁹

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16. Stephen Phillips, Panama and Other Poems, p. 54, lines 3 - 8.

17. Stephen Phillips, Poems, p. 2, lines 9 - 10.

18. Ibid., p. 3, lines 5 - 6.

19. Ibid., p. 6, lines 10 - 14.

One of Mr. Phillips's first attempts at poetry was "The Dreaming Muse", in which he experimented with the heroic couplet. In these two lines there is a peculiar, indefinable poignancy that hints at that sense of the spectral beauty of the world which is so marked in Mr. Phillips's poetry:

"For, sitting in the dim and ghostly night
She fain would stay the strong approach of
light."²⁰

In his experimentation in the heroic couplet, Mr. Phillips has sometimes employed the rhymed iambic pentameter with the run-over endings, technically called "enjambements". Instances of the run-over lines are found in "The Woman with the Dead Soul":

"So cold her gaze that I bowed down my head
Trembling; it seemed to me that she was dead."²¹

"Yet think how I stood mourning by the side
Of her who sat, but seemed as she had died;"²²

Beside the heroic couplet which he molded artistically, Mr. Phillips experimented with a variety of verse patterns. Here is a peculiar scheme of rhyme and rhythm; it has the a,a,b,b,c,c, rhyme. It is a couplet, with line-meters of varied length—the first line being iambic pentameter, the second iambic tetrameter and so alternating through the poem.

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20. Stephen Phillips, New Poems, p. 95, lines 11 - 12.

21. Stephen Phillips, Poems, p. 2, lines 11 - 12.

22. Ibid., p. 3, lines 3 - 4.

"Dearest, our love is not of dark or bright,
Or verses murmured in midnight;
Nor hath it aid from starlight or the moon,
Or music's long and splendid swoon.
Not time, nor distance over it have power,
No, nor the dead and wingless hour.
Though simple and of everyday it seems,
It holds the quality of dream."²³

One verse form is employed by the poet in a number of poems. It is a pattern which contains pentameter and trimeter lines alternating, with no rhyme scheme.

"Sadly, apparently frustrate, life hangs
above us,
Cruel, dark, unexplained;
Yet still the immortal through mortal
incessantly pierces
With calls, with appeals, and with lures.
Lure of the sinking sun, into undreamed islands,
Fortunate, far in the West;"²⁴

Another of a similar pattern is "Midnight - the 31st of December, 1900".

"Lo! now on the midnight the soul of the
century passing,
And on midnight the voice of the Lord!
'In the years that have been I have made an
oblivion for anguish,
And stillness in place of a cry;" 25

And another - - "Thoughts in a Meadow";

"And never alone can we listen to twilight
music;
Others listen and weep,
And the woman that sings in the dimness to
Millions is singing;
Not to thee, O my soul, alone." 26

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23. Stephen Phillips, Lyrics and Dramas, p. 22, lines 1 - 8.

24. Ibid., p. 1, lines 1 - 6.

25. Stephen Phillips, New Poems, p. 28, lines 1 - 4.

26. Ibid., p. 93, lines 7 - 10.

Here is an experiment with a pattern quite different in stanza form and rhyming scheme, from Mr. Phillips's usual form. The poem "A Man" presents a stanza of three lines of which the first and second are iambic tetrameter, and the last iambic pentameter - with triplet rhyme:

I.

"O for a living man to lead!
That will not babble when we bleed;
O for the silent doer of the deed!

II.

One that is happy in his height;
And one that, in a nation's might,
Hath solitary certitude of light."²⁷

The poem "After Rain", not in stanzaic form, has a peculiar pattern and is not at all regular in meter. The rhyme scheme is as follows: a,b,a,b,c,c,d,d,e,f,e,f,g,g and so on through the poem.

The poem, "A Girl's Last Words", in quatrains, has an iambic tetrameter followed by an iambic trimeter line, with an a,b,a,b, rhyming scheme:

"I wonder, do they ever speak	a
My name in that green home	b
And silent fields beyond the streets	a
And pavements that I roam?"	b ²⁸

Another poem of two quatrains has a rhyming scheme of a,b,c,b with this scansion:

.....

27. Stephen Phillips, New Poems, p. 72, lines 1 - 6.

28. Ibid., p. 108, lines 1 - 4.

"Sad is the crystal tear	- u u - u -
From eyes of youth,	u - u - ,
Sadder the slower drops	- u u - u -
Of married ruth.	u - u - .

Sad tears of maid or wife,	u - u - u - ,
Brimming to fall;	- uu - ;
Often the tearless eye	- u u - u -
Saddest of all." ²⁹	- u u - .

Stepehn Phillips is not a sonneteer as were Tennyson, or Milton or Shakespeare, or even as a number of modern poets who experiment with this pattern. This one, "Keats" is lyrical in its beauty, melodious in its song:

a	"Lament is made that thou wast all too young,
b	When Death to silence carried thee away,
a	With brain ungleaned, and many songs unsung,
b	Giving the promise of so fair a day.
c	But I have seen more glory in sunrise
d	Than in the deepening of the azure noon,
c	Gleaming untimely gold in fairer skies
d	Than ever lay about an arctic moon.
e	And I have caught in darkness ere the sun,
f	A lovelier-liquid note from matin bird
e	Warbled, than when the full day had begun,
f	Or in the mid-day splendor I have heard.
g	Better to leave behind a world to sigh,
g	Than living fail a world to satisfy." ³⁰

Stephen Phillips is essentially a composer of blank verse music. Indeed, his blank verse is finer than his work in rhyme. When he undertook literary pursuits as his life career he gave himself more and more intently to the study of the great masters of song, especially to the Greeks and to Milton. He realized that the branch of poetic form which

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29. Stephen Phillips, Lyrics and Dramas, p. 9.

30. Ibid., p. 31.

which had recently been most neglected was blank verse; it was his determination to restore to that most difficult and most delicate form of verse, its richness, its variety and its old dignity. Thus he attempted the most difficult vehicle in literary art - and he succeeded.

His masterpieces of lyrical intensity and beauty, "Marpessa", and "Christ in Hades", are clothed in his impassioned blank verse. In the manipulation of this verse pattern Mr. Phillips has wrought conformity rather than any deviation from the normal. In "Christ in Hades", there are a number of lines that defy the ordinary rules of scansion; in "Marpessa", there are fewer, and none that cannot be defended, and in "Endymion" there are fewer still. In "Christ in Hades", there are passages which show a conscious and deliberate study of Milton, while the other two betray a Tennysonian touch.

Blank verse - the unrhymed iambic pentameter - is a most difficult instrument to play upon; variety should be the aim of the composer - variety, however, within certain limits. And Stephen Phillips attains variety. Yet there are phrases which can be condemned. For example, in "Christ in Hades", this line limps:

"And one yearning so wide as is the world";³¹

.....

31. Stephen Phillips, Poems, p. 103, line 11.

and does not merely drag; the fault lies not in the inverted foot, but in the sequence of weak syllables following it. In short, the effect, designed no doubt to heighten the physical suggestion conveyed in the word 'yearning', is gained at the sacrifice of true rhythm. Worse still is this instance:

"Just as a widower that dreaming holds
His dead wife in his arms, not wondering,
So natural it appears; then starting up
With trivial words, or even with a jest,
Realizes all the uncolored dawn,
And near his head the young bird in the leaves
Stirring; not less, not otherwise do we
Want in this colorless country the warm earth."

That is a fine passage of finely - varied cadences, utterly marred by the one intolerable line "Realizes all the uncolored dawn." The word "realizes" can only be scanned as two trochees, and no iambic line can possibly begin with it; for in iambic verse the total effect of any line must be iambic.

In other instances, the boldness of experiment can only be justified by assuming a quickness of apprehension which the ordinary reader does not possess. Proserpina begins her speech:

"'O all fresh out of sunlight!
Thine eyes are still too dazed to see us clear.'"

The balance of the first of these lines demands that it should be read with a pause upon the first syllable and a distribution of the accent on the last word "sunlight", which is hardly natural. Yet, for the special emphasis, accent is needed upon the "light"; it is as though the poet claimed attention

for the two parts of the word. Whether this device be or be not admissible may be argued, but it is habitual with Mr. Phillips.

...

A commendable boldness may be exemplified with these lines:

"A wonderful stillness stopped her; like to
 trees
 Motionless in an ecstasy of rain,
 So the tall dead stood drooping around
 Christ."

Nobody can stick to the rhythm of the first line, yet it is entirely irregular. But if it be made regular by removing the first word, the stress instantly falls on the word "Wonderful", not when it is needed on "stillness". As it stands, the ear is grateful, not only for a variation of the cadence, which it interrupts but does not derange the iambic rhythm, but also for the just emphasis.³²

This line "Realizes all the uncolored dawn" and a few others in "Christ in Hades" have aroused much comment. In the Academy, volume 54, for September 24, 1898, there is an article written in a very humorous vein. The article, "The Scansion Case", reported a very pretty little quarrel, a case for a Court of Minnesingers, had one been in existence. This case turned on the laws of verse - "J. D." accused Stephen Phillips

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32. Living Age, CCXXIV, p. 666.

of passing upon the public bad metrical coin; and incidentally called him (in a strictly metrical sense) a babe and a suckling. Mr. Phillips denied the charge.

Despite these variations in rhythm, these poems are masterpieces - the veritable gold of song conceived in very carefully manipulated blank verse. Indeed, Stephen Phillips is the chief modern exponent of the poetic drama in English; the poetic drama that is neither the closet-drama nor the dramatic poem. It is a play poetic and dramatic as to form and content - an acting play in verse possessing the beauty and the ideality which are associated with poetry at its best. As a chief exponent of modern poetic drama, Mr. Phillips adopted blank verse as his vehicle of artistic expression.

His first play, "Paolo and Francesca", is a powerful one, and Mr. Phillips maintains in it the lyric quality and the exquisite beauty as well as the powerful pitch of style of all which is so striking in his earlier poems. It is an exquisite and glowing poem with a vigor of thought, an intensity of emotion and a conception of dramatic possibilities that go to make the drama great. The blank verse employed is, without question, the most noble to be found in all his poetic dramas.

Note the lyric tone in these lines:

"What is it to be sad?

Nothing hath grieved me yet but ancient woes,
 Sea-perils, or some long-ago farewell.
 Or the last sunset cry of wounded kings.
 I have wept but on the pages of a book,
 And I have longed for sorrow of my own."³³

The method of "Paolo and Francesca" is partly Elizabethan, inasmuch as there are lighter prose scenes introduced for the relief of tension or for the pointing of a contrast. The soldiers in Scene II of Act II speak mostly in prose; and likewise the peasant girls and Tessa converse in prose form in the shop of Pulci - Act III, Scene I. The method is partly Greek, inasmuch as the sense of doom and of the great ironies of life envelop the action from the beginning.

Stephen Phillips wrote "Herod" in his favorite Marlowesque blank verse with the pause constantly near the end of the line; and this verse seems to harmonize better with the Marlowesque intensity of the tragic passion than a more free and varied rhythm might have done. This great tragedy has to do with great primitive passions; it is a stern, heroic tragedy without a touch of comedy, or gayety, or that humor with which Shakespeare was willing to lighten a play like "Hamlet". There is no relief in the action nor in the lines from the first to the last.

These lines, in substance and in spirit, echo the very voice of Marlowe, a voice whose accents are heard again when Herod returns to Jerusalem clamoring for his queen:

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33. Stephen Phillips, Paolo and Francesca, p. 16, lines 13 - 16, p. 17, lines 1 - 3.

"Summon the queen,
Or I will call not earthly vengeance down.
I have exhausted earth, I'll fetch the lightning
And call on thunder like an emperor!"³⁴

And the echo resounds when he will create her by his power of
love:

"I'll re-create her out of endless yearning,
And flesh shall cleave to bone, and blood
shall run,
Do I not know her, every vein? Can I
Not imitate in furious ecstasy
What God hath coldly made? I'll re-create
My love with bone for bone and vein for vein."³⁵

The tendency toward the pictorial is apparent in
"Ulysses" which becomes a panorama and a poem rather than a
drama.

The parley of the gods is carried on in pentameter
couplets. The rhymed pentameter, besides being a doubtful
vehicle for majestic speech, is always difficult to use in
dialogue, and Stephen Phillips shows that he is not in his
native element. Here and there the prologue rises to poetry,
but this is when Mr. Phillips drops the ironic masque and
glides into the elegiac or introspective key. For the thing
he does best is in the note of elegy or a melodious expression
of a mood of anxiousness. The Prologue moves chiefly on the
level of :

"Who hath so suffered, or so far hath sailed,
So much encountered, and so little quailed?"³⁶

.....

34. Stephen Phillips, Herod, p. 122, lines 7 - 10.

35. Ibid., p. 123, lines 6 - 11.

36. Stephen Phillips, Ulysses, p. 13, lines 14 - 15.

Occasionally it rises to such a line as:

"Mocked by the green of some receding shore."³⁷

In The Bookman, Volume 15, is found this criticism of "Ulysses":

The first act opens with a page or two of decidedly prosy prose; but with the appearance of Athene, the words fall back into the stately beat of Mr. Phillips's blank verse. Mr. Phillips has been criticised for writing 1 lines which resist all attempts at scansion; but when the pedants give up trying to scan English verse by Latin feet, and measure it instead by accentual stress, his lines will be found to present few difficulties. Athene's opening speech is a good example of his more complex rhythms, and one may conceive that the Latin measuring-rod must fly into splinters in contact with such uncoercible lines as:

"When he leapt among them, when he
flashed, when he cried,
When he flew on them, when he struck,
when he stamped them dead!"

Those who refuse to test English verse by the rules of Latin prosody may maintain that in such measures Mr. Phillips is at his

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37. Stephen Phillips, Ulysses, p. 13, line 7.

best, and that his courage and originality in the use of rhythm are his surest safeguard against a certain effeminacy - a leaning to the Tennyson of the *Idylls* rather than that of *Ulysses*.

The first scene of the first act undoubtedly contains some of the best verse in the play, and not only its finest line, but perhaps, on the whole, the finest line the author has ever written: when Athene, striving to turn Telemachus against the suitors, replies to his whining:

"Goddess, I am but one and they are many"
with the god-like cry:

"Thou art innumerable as thy wrongs!"³⁸

Tennysonian echoes of spirit and form, may be detected here and there in "*Ulysses*", not only in the lotos-eating scene of the first act, but also when *Ulysses* encourages his men as they embark:

" Now each man to the oar
And, leaning all together, smite the sea!
For it is fated we shall see our homes!"³⁹

Tennyson speaks of death as sweetening life; here Mr. Phillips develops that conception with greater force when he makes *Ulysses* reject Calypso's proffer of immortality:

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38. The Bookman, XV (April 1902), p. 169.

39. Stephen Phillips, Ulysses, p. 72, lines 4 - 6.

"I would not take life but on terms of death,
That sting in the wine of being, salt of its
feast.

To mewhat rapture in the ocean path
Save in the white leap and the dance of doom?
O death, thou hast a beckon to the brave,
Thou last sea of the navigator, last
Plunge of the diver, and last hunter's leap."40

"The Sin of David" lacks the lyrical fervor of the earlier plays of its author and his purple patches of description. Perhaps, it is better drama, but it is poorer poetry. Very few lines approach a rhythm easily and naturally great. In fact, it is difficult to read any passage of more than a line or two without tripping and being forced to go back.

The explanation of this is simple. It is that the natural tempo of Mr. Phillips's verse is fast, inasmuch as his natural bias is toward rapidly delivered speeches of a highly emotional character. So long as the delivery is rapid, faults of scansion escape notice. The voice sweeps over them and the rhythm of the paragraph becomes more important than the prosody of the line. Most of his speeches work up to a climax, both of sense and of rhythm. The following passage, for example, if read swiftly, has a kind of emotional rhythm, but read slowly, and with due regard to the line, is seen to limp in more than one place:

.....

"That bud was mine; and I have cankered
 it;
 And though my boy came from me without
 spot,
 And though his body from the scythe of
 Death
 Lieth as sweet as mown grass in the even,
 Yet on his soul were deep transmitted
 stains,
 And tell tale scars, to spirits visible."

The second and fourth lines are bad, but they are saved by the swing of the whole passage. Mr. Phillips's verse in short drives us on at breakneck speed.⁴¹

In "Nero", his next tragedy, Mr. Phillips frankly returns to the type of piece already tried by him in "Herod". Signs of a decline in the dramatic and poetic power of the poet may be detected here and there in "Nero". The verse is still majestic, but, more frequently than heretofore, it is used for ends rhetorical rather than dramatic.

"Faust", a collaboration of Mr. Phillips's and Mr. Carr's, is for the most part a literal translation or a free paraphrase of Goethe's poem. In fact, the collaborators have used extreme freedom of adaptation of the great master's creation.

"Faust" contains passages of bad blank verse, as in the following lines, - bad, because the word "shores" which ends one line has the same vowel sound as "soars" which ends the preceding line:

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41. Fortnightly Review, LXXXIII (April 1, 1905), p. 840.

" As over crag
 And piney headland slow the eagle soared,
 And past me sailed the crane to other shores."⁴²

Despite these bad passages, the two poets have succeeded admirably with this blank verse which they have substituted for the original meter.

In "Pietro of Siena", the fall from power is amazing. It seems that Mr. Phillips has now lost that exquisite touch which was so characteristic of him in "Paolo and Francesca"; and his blank verse is no more an instrument of majestic movement. Only at the opening of the third act is the old poetic eloquence still heard, as Luigi, condemned to die at sunrise, laments that he must pass into darkness while all else brightens with the dawn.

"The dawn, the dawn! Now when all wakes
 to life,
 I wake to death. When all revives, I die.
 This freshness and the coming color make
 The faint grave worse. Oh, but to die at dawn!
 At midnight, yes! but not when the world stirs,
 When the Creator reassures the earth,
 And reappears in balm out of the East.
 Now must I give up life, now when the bird
 Resumes its carol and the old music makes.
 Now must I go to silence; never there
 The twitter of the brown bird in the leaves,
 Nor rustle of foliage there, nor flushing sky."⁴³

It must be said in fairness, that delightful as is Mr. Phillips's command of diction and of rhythm, it is not certain that his style is entirely suitable to dramatic poetry.

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42. Stephen Phillips and J. C. Carr, Faust, p. 9, lines 4 - 6.

43. Stephen Phillips, Pietro of Siena, p. 39, lines 1 - 12.

However, with all his limitations, Stephen Phillips is the chief modern exponent of the poetic drama in English. He has attempted the most difficult instrument of literary art - the blank verse pattern - and he has succeeded. Mr. Phillips's poetry is lyrically beautiful; he responds to the loveliness of the world and truly sings.

Chapter Four.

The Dramatic Career of
Stephen Phillips.

"I will think in gold and dream in silver,
Imagine in marble and in bronze conceive."

Herod, Act III, Lines 219-220.

Chapter Four.

The Dramatic Career of Stephen Phillips.

In this chapter on the Dramatic Career of Stephen Phillips, the aim is to present a resumé of each principal drama, with a study of the defects and merits, some of the literary criticisms as found in various periodicals and also criticisms of the staging possibilities of the plays.

Stephen Phillips is the chief exponent of the poetic drama in modern English. Chandler, in his Aspects of Modern Drama edited in 1914, says: "Whatever future fame the English poetic drama of the first decade of the new century may boast will rest upon the achievements of one man - Stephen Phillips. On him, for English-speaking folk, have been hung, in Tennysonian phrase, 'all the hopes of half the world', - that half which is always yearning for the literary play in verse."¹

But have the hopes been fulfilled, or have the drama-loving folk been disappointed? Has Stephen Phillips, as a poetic dramatist, met the desires of the people? If not, why? There are adequate answers to these questions, and it is the purpose of this chapter to point the way toward them.

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1. Chandler, F. W., Aspects of Modern Drama, pp. 380 - 381.

First, let it be kept in mind that this is poetic drama of which Shakespeare is master - the poetic drama of which Shakespeare is a standard by which every struggling modern poetic dramatist is measured. The poetic drama, strictly defined, is neither the closet-drama nor the dramatic poem. "It is a play poetic and dramatic as to form and content - an acting play in verse possessing the beauty and ideality which we associate with poetry at its best. The true poetic play is not one merely stuccoed with verse, it is one in which the verse is an essential and inevitable outflowing of the playwright's thought. It must also be theatrical, for dramatic talent, as Pinero has pointed out, is merely 'the raw material of theatrical talent; ... it must be developed into theatrical talent by hard study, and generally by long practice.' Thus, the true poetic drama must be at once theatrical, dramatic, and poetical; it must stand apart from mere dramatic poetry, on the one hand, and from mere closet-drama, on the other. Needless to say, such plays are the most difficult of all to write for the modern theater, and the least often actually written. William Archer, a competent critic, has lately affirmed of the English theater 'an appalling fact, that for at least two centuries - from 1700 to 1900 - not a single blank verse play was produced which lives or which deserves to live on the stage of to-day.'"²

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2. Chandler, F. W., Aspects of Modern Drama, p. 379.

The chief exponent of modern poetic drama, Stephen Phillips, joined the theatrical company of his cousin, Sir Frank Benson, about 1885, and made the round of British provinces. The brother, Harold Phillips, reports that the most important role played by Stephen Phillips was that of Iago, but in his efforts to avoid all that smacked of the typical conception, he created an Iago of a straight-forward, bluff, manly villain type that eliminated any suggestion of the sinister in the character. According to other reports, he made his reputation as an actor in the part of the Ghost in Hamlet. It is said that he acted this with a dignity so awful, and spoke with such a calm, sepulchral voice that the audience was held spell-bound; in fact, he was called before the curtain, a distinction, for the rôle, believed to be unparalleled. Even though Mr. Phillips may not have become famous as an actor, he must have been more than fairly presentable as he continued to be a member of the company for six years. The knowledge which he gained in this period of the practical side of stage craft served as a foundation for his later productions of the poetic drama.

After leaving the stage Mr. Phillips was encouraged to adopt letters as his vocation. His volume "Poems" (1898) was hailed with great acclaim; and the public was furthermore astounded with the appearance of his first drama "Paolo and Francesca". Delays in the staging of his "Paolo and Francesca",

commissioned by Sir George Alexander in 1898, allowed it to be applauded first as a printed book in 1900.

Thus, Mr. Phillips, at his first attempt at writing poetic drama, managed to produce a play which immediately eclipsed in popularity anything that the older and more distinguished poet, Tennyson, had attempted in the same line. The success of "Paolo and Francesca", as a reading play, was as instantaneous and assured as that of the earlier lyrics. It was thought that at last the looked-for poetic dramatist had appeared who was to carry on the noble traditions of the Elizabethan stage.

Now consider the play itself and the boldness of the poet to attempt the immortal story as told by Dante.

The critic Sidney Colvin has stated a truth very simply when he wrote: "If a picked jury of the educated lovers of literature could be asked to agree on the question, what is the most perfect passage of love poetry, or at least of poetry telling of the pity and tragedy of love, in the world, I suppose there could be but one possible answer. They could hardly for a moment hesitate to give the first place to the sixty lines in the Fifth Canto of Dante's "Inferno", beginning

'Quali colombe dal disio chiamate'

and ending

'Ecaddi come corpo morto cade.'

The tale of Francesca da Rimini, as told in that passage, is touched with a purging fire of human pity, an intensity and at the same time an exquisite reticence of passion, an austere but all the more moving bareness and simplicity of speech."³ This passage stands consecrated, stands apart, among the highest and immortal achievements of the poetic spirit in our race.

Successors of Dante might well hesitate in touching again a subject once touched by such a master and in such a manner. But as a matter of fact, they have not hesitated. One writer after another has allowed himself to be allured by the light of Dante, and has approached the same impassioned theme, for the most part only to fall or flutter ineffectually around about it.

When the English public had heard the subject of Mr. Phillips's drama, it was conscious of the peril he had to run; one could but fear for the young poet and for the outcome of his effort. It was a bold man who dared to handle again in verse this immortal story of the lovers, and the highest commendation that can be said of Mr. Phillips is that he stands justified of his daring.

Mr. Phillips's "Paolo and Francesca" is the famous story of Giovanni Malatesta, tyrant of Rimini, who married Francesca, the daughter of Palenta of Ravenna. As Arthur

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Lancelot, so Giovanni sent his youthful, beloved brother, Paolo, to bring home his bride; and the new Lancelot and Guinevere fello under the old fate. After a time, drawn together against their will, Giovanni found them in each other's arms and stabbed them.

The principal 'dramatis personae' are only three or four. These are Giovanni, the grim warrior-statesman who heretofore has had only one strong affection in life, that for his young brother Paolo; Francesca, a maiden "all dewy from the convent fetched"; and Paolo, the handsome young brother distracted by loyalty to his brother and an irresistible passion. Among the attendants stands a personage whom Mr. Phillips has invented, - a subordinate to the other three, and yet scarcely a subordinate as she forced herself more than once into the extreme foreground of the action. This is Lucrezia, the widowed cousin of Giovanni who has been the ruler of the house for many years. "'Childless and husbandless, yet bitter true,' she forseees a disastrous result from the marriage, dimly at first, then clearly; half desires it; and helps, despite one great revulsion of remorse, to bring it about. These four figures are each conceived at a height and pitch of being where one prevailing passion or strain of character absorbs the minor and more shifting shades of personality. Each becomes a type rather than a mere individual.

each playing into the hands of fate unconsciously at first and afterwards with those vain efforts of reluctance and resistance which are the essence of tragedy."⁴ Two other characters of any importance are Angela, a seer of visions, and Pulsi, a drug-seller.

The scene opens in a gloomy hall of the Malatesta castle in Rimini where Giovanni awaits the coming of his bride. The opening word "Peace" and the succeeding lines take up the irony. This is no wedding song:

"Peace to this house of Rimini henceforth!
Kinsmen, although the Ghibelline is fallen
And lies out on the plains of Trentola
Still have we foes, untrampled, wavering friends."⁵

Paolo, the beloved brother escorts the bride from Ravenna -
Francesca, the lovely child who:

"hath but wondered up at the white clouds;
Hath just spread out her hands to the warm sun;
Hath heard but gentle words and cloister sounds."⁶

She is received by her husband and presented to her new household and to Lucrezia. In the passion of his thought Giovanni grips the girl's hand until the tears stand in her eyes:

"... Yet one word more - be sure
That, though I sheathe the sword, I am not tamed."⁷

It is an ill omen.

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4. The Nineteenth Century, XLVI (December 1899), p. 923.

5. Stephen Phillips, Paolo and Francesca, p. 11, lines 1 - 4.

6. Ibid., p. 15, lines 4 - 5.

7. Ibid., p. 15, lines 8 - 9.

Left alone for a moment with Paolo, she cannot but turn to him for comfort; she fears, yet not knowing what she fears - she is overwhelmed with a dark, foreboding sense of doom that oppresses her. In their words there is a vague prophecy of the tragedy that is in the air:

" Francesca: O, Paolo,
who were they that have lived within these walls?

Paolo: Why do you ask?

Francesca: It is not sign nor sound;
Only it seemeth difficult to breathe,
It is as though I battled with this air.

Paolo: You are not sad?

Francesca: What is it to be sad?
Nothing hath grieved me yet but ancient woes,
Sea-perils, or some long-ago farewell."⁸

On his mission as Francesca's escort, Paolo has already sensed (like Lancelot of old) how perilous to him is the charm of her presence and that flight is his only honorable resource. Giovanni will not hear of his departure and commands his participation in the wedding festivity.

Giovanni receives a double note of warning, first from Lucrezia who seems the jealous housekeeper. "Giovanni takes this as instance of her 'old bitterness'; whereupon she breaks into a confession of the source and secret of that bitterness - namely the misery of the childless woman. I am not quite sure but that to an audience at this moment, and

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8. Stephen Phillips, Paolo and Francesca, p. 16, lines 6 - 15.

in this place, the confession may seem somewhat forced and gratuitous. Why, from a character whose part seems to be subordinated, this sudden tremendous burst of confidence, and of confidence relating not to some instantly passing occasion, but to a chronic state or habit of the soul? But the development of the play in the Fourth Act will be found to require and justify the outbreak here, and the speech is of extraordinary tragic and human power."⁹

The second warning which the bridegroom receives is more explicit and prophesies an impending calamity. This warning comes from Angela, an old blind muse and foster-mother of Giovanni. She falls into a trance and sees two lovers - one Francesca, the other she knows not for his face is dim, reading in an arbor; the scene changes to one in which the same two lie on a bier slain together in each other's arms. But who, who is the lover? The vision dims. But these words give the key-note of the coming drama:

" Giovanni: Speak, speak, then!

Angela He shall be
Not far to seek; yet perilous to find.
Unwillingly he comes a wooing: she
Unwillingly is wooed: yet shall they woo.
His kiss was on her lips ere she was born."¹⁰

In the second act the net closes and the victims know themselves enmeshed. Paolo urges his own departure, yet Giovanni has a new reason that he should stay - he has been

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9. Nineteenth Century, XLVI (December 1899), p. 925.

10. Stephen Phillips, Paolo and Francesca, p. 30, lines 11-15.

warned of peril to Francesca and as he must be absent on war-like affairs, Paolo must remain to defend her. The more Giovanni urges, the more strongly Paolo recoils. Giovanni asks Francesca to plead for him and in her ignorance and innocence of heart she does so. In Paolo's departure, the young bride learns for the first time her power over him, and feels within herself the dawn of an emotion answering his own.

Giovanni, a prey to his own fears, confides in Lucrezia. In a scene of great intensity, Lucrezia leads him on - she understands the meaning of Angela's words. Gradually she urges him on and on until the name is on his lips, - yet he shrinks:

" Giovanni: Is it? -

Lucrezia: Giovanni! who shall set a shore to love?

When hath it ever swerved from death, or when
Hath it not burned away all barriers,
Even dearest ties of mother and of son,
Even of brothers? -

Giovanni: Is it Paolo?"¹¹

The next scene, deliberately thrown in to relieve, for the moment the increasing gloom, is in prose of a curious ringing quality,--a drinking song which could scarcely be bettered with its spirit of recklessness. The soldiers are bidding their girls goodbye - with laughter, not with tears. The soldiers march out: the officers enter - and Paolo, - Paolo who can look only down the road to Rimini:

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" Those battlements
Are burning! They catch fire, those parapets!
And through the blaze both her white face look
out
Like one forgot, yet possible to save."¹²

And the Third Act opens with another passage where, for a moment, life is at play, though in a sinister shadow. In the apothecary's shop, Tessa sells her love potions and cosmetics to girls; her father, Pulci, after closing hours, deals in more dangerous wares. Seeming to be puppets of destiny, Giovanni and Paolo both seek the apothecary's shop the same night - Giovanni for a love potion to bind Francesca to him; and Paolo for poison. Giovanni hears Paolo's confession to the purveyor; after his impulse to kill has cooled, there follows a storm of misery and remorse - he loves his young brother and must not allow him to drink of the fatal potion.

"Next follows the scene which is the masterpiece of the play, not for vehemence or stormy power, but for a degree of impassioned delicacy and imaginative tact for which Dante himself might have praised and smiled upon his follower. It is the famous arbor scene, no less, that Mr. Phillips has now the daring to venture. In the hush just before dawn, Francesca comes out into the garden, attended by her maid, from the chamber where she cannot rest. With lamp and book beside her, she seeks, her maid dismissed, to refresh her spirits in the solitude and coolness of the dawn."¹³ The following is an

12. Stephen Phillips, Paolo and Francesca, p. 59, lines 16 - 18;
p. 60, line 1.

13. Nineteenth Century, XLVI (December 1899), p. 929.

impassioned scene between Francesca and Paolo. The dialogue breaks out into an alternate reading to each other by the two lovers from a book "Lancelot". This is not the crude, original Lancelot, but one composed by Mr. Phillips with a beauty of feeling and an exquisite touch. Worthily rewritten is the arbor scene leading up to the fatal kiss.

Act Four opens with the return of Giovanni - Giovanni who is restless for news of his brother - and of his wife. He learns from Lucrezia of Paolo's return; he is furious and considers his brother a traitor. He will kill him - and Francesca when he finds them in each other's arms. Lucrezia suggests a scheme of feigned departure which he adopts. With bitter raillery he recommends Francesca to the loyal protection of Paolo. Francesca, feeling the toils of passion and of catastrophe closing in about her, beseeches him not to go - but in vain. "Left alone and trembling at the knowledge that Paolo is at hand longing for admission, Francesca throws herself upon Lucrezia with a passionate appeal, as a child to its mother, for pity and help in her perplexity. This appeal touches the latent, long pent springs of maternity in Lucrezia's heart. With a sudden revulsion and a wild outburst of hysterical vehemence, she clasps Francesca to her as the late-found child of all her empty dreams."¹⁴

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14. Nineteenth Century, XLVI (December 1899), p. 931.

But the tragedy marches on. Lucrezia, remembering the trap she has helped to lay, in an agony, rushes out to intercept Giovanni. So, striving to combat fate, she works with it, for Francesca is left alone and sorely tried as she hears Paolo's step in the garden -

"A sad step, and it goeth to and fro."

At last she succumbs to his calls. He comes in, in a whirl of reckless passion, gaiety and confidence; his presence and mood fire Francesca. "At the end, in a passage of triumphantly impassioned declamation, the lover foresees and exults in that doom for himself and Francesca which Dante has related as a witness to the after world."¹⁵

The lovers pass behind the curtains. Scarcely are they gone before Nita returns and after her Lucrezia, desperate with a vain search; and now where is Francesca? At that moment, a hand appears between the curtains - it is Giovanni. Giovanni and Lucrezia confront each other in a dreadful pause. She notices blood upon his hand, "'Tis not my blood!" He speaks at first in a strange calm, but he soon breaks into a nervous frenzy; wildly he summons all the servants to bring in lights, lights for a marriage ceremony of the dead lovers. Paolo and Francesca are brought in on a litter, and Giovanni kisses them tenderly.

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15. Nineteenth Century, XLVI (December 1899), p. 931.

" She takes away my strength.
I did not know the dead could have such hair.
Hide them. They look like children fast asleep."¹⁶

And thus the drama is brought, beautifully and classically, from a pitch of distraction and calamity to a tragic, heartrending but harmonious and reconciling close.

When the drama was issued in book form in 1900, it took the reading world by storm. Mr. Phillips was placed immediately in the first ranks of modern dramatists and of modern poetry. This achievement was spoken of as something without parallel in this age. But read Mr. William Archer's laudation of "Paolo and Francesca":

Mr. Phillips has answered in the affirmative the question which I propounded in these columns last month: Is living poetic drama possible in English? He has produced in "Paolo and Francesca" a live poem and a live drama, a thing of exquisite form, yet tingling from first to last with intense dramatic life.... What Mr. Phillips has done is to prove that genius can shake off the spell of the Elizabethans, and that a blank-verse play is not necessarily an imitative anachronism. He has chosen a theme of pure passion, and has steeped it in an atmosphere of pure poetry. ... It seems

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16. Stephen Phillips, Paolo and Francesca, p. 120, lines 6 - 8.

almost impossible that anyone should take "Paolo and Francesca" out of the "bufera infernal che mai non resta" and bring them back to earth again, without vulgarizing them and their fate. Mr. Phillips has achieved the impossible, and in so doing has produced a play that lives and breathes in every line. Sardou could not have ordered the action more skilfully. Tennyson could not have clothed the passion in words of purer loveliness.¹⁷

This is only one of the many enthusiastic press announcements that greeted Mr. Phillips. His popularity was at a great height and undaunted by adverse press criticisms - some of which will be considered.

In this play, Mr. Phillips has followed Greek convention more than the Elizabethan. And a play written under Greek influence may turn out to be singularly modern in the best sense of the word. The main theme of the story - that of wrongful love, is Greek. A sense of doom hurries the action which from beginning to end marches with the tread of fate. "Thoroughly steeped in Greek dramatic tradition is the play in its frank unfolding of the plot from the very first. The blind old nurse, Angela, does the work of the AEschylean chorus in early giving the spectator the thrill of coming and

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17. The Critic, XXXVI (Feb. 1900), pp. 156-157.

fated horror. No need to trick with unexpected denouement when the whole tragedy lies in the soul. And Mr. Phillips follows the Greeks, finally, rather than the Elizabethans, in making the bloody catastrophe take place off the stage; trusting to the participants as more powerful, artistically, than the brute strangling or stabbing in full view."¹⁸

This is a tragedy of fate, not a tragedy of character. Throughout the criticisms of the press runs a thread of disappointment in Mr. Phillips's delineation of character. Critics felt, particularly after the drama was staged in 1902 that the play was almost a failure, not because of any default of construction, but in a lack of character portrayal.

"Paolo and Francesca", following exactly the same lines as 'Pelleas et Melisande' of Maeterlinck, fails exactly where "Pelleas et Melisande" succeeds. Maeterlinck's characters are, indeed, moods rather than people, but partly for that very reason, they speak out of an inner existence which is the inner existence of all humanity; and they say things so startlingly profound in their simplicity that we seem at once never to have heard them before and yet always to have known them by heart. Paolo and Francesca say gracious things to one

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18. Atlantic Monthly. LXXXV (Feb. 1900), p. 279.

another, charming idyllic things which one hears the poet prompting them to say; but they always say things, they do not speak straight out. ... People in a play must really be people, and they must speak sincerely; that is the first requirement.

... "Paolo and Francesca" is not founded on any great conception, it is not well constructed, it does not contain any really living character. ... The people of a great dramatist seem to break away from his control, as if they forgot their maker, who can but strive to heighten the beauty of the words through which they express themselves. Having set them in motion, he is not responsible for the course they take: he is the automaton, not they. We hear their speech, and we say rightly that they could not have spoken otherwise. Is there any great drama of which this is not to be said? Is there any part of Mr. Phillips's drama of which this could be said?¹⁹

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19. The Athenaeum, 1900, (Jan. - June) (Jan. 6, 1900), pp. 6 - 7.

But, is the above criticism quite fair to Mr. Phillips? Has not the Shakespearian criterion been used too freely? "Paolo and Francesca" is the most dramatic of Mr. Phillips's plays; it is the least overlaid with ornament. The play is the thing all through but that does not prevent the poet from making the speeches of his characters glow, at times, with ideal beauty. Indeed, the play is a blending of poetic sweetness with dramatic strength; it is an exquisite drama of poetic beauty. These are the essential qualities of strength present in the play. The weakness in character portrayal, as has been pointed out, is the weakness which anticipates the dramatist's failure.

Thus, Mr. Phillips gained a stupendous reputation as a dramatic poet. Before "Paolo and Francesca", his first play, was given on the stage, his second play, "Herod", was produced on the 31st of October, 1900, at Her Majesty's Theatre, by Mr. H. Beerbohm Tree.

In this play, Mr. Phillips resorts to history for the theme:

The first thing to strike a reader of Mr. Phillips's play, "Herod", who knows his Josephus is the simplicity which the poet has followed the Jewish historian. Not only are the main incidents, such as the murder of Aristobulus and his sister

Queen Mariamne, with their motives and consequences, taken direct from history, but minor incidents also, such as the jealousy of Herod's mother and sister roused by Mariamne's contempt for their insignificant origin, the betrayal of Herod's confidence by Schemus, the spicing of the wine-cup and the cool reception Mariamne gives to her lord on his return from the interview with Octavian, are transferred by the poet from the historian's pages. To say this is not to derogate from Mr. Phillips's originality, but to insist upon it. Just as truly as Shakespeare's play, "Coriolanus", was implicit in North's 'Plutarch', so Mr. Phillips's was implicit in Josephus. But in the one case, as in the other, it required the eye of genius to discover it. Now that the play has been written; it seems wonderful that no one should have written it before, for many poets have gone in search of passion; and Josephus lays stress upon the enthusiastic and almost ungovernable nature of Herod's passion for Mariamne, and in his narrative, as in the play, the episode closes with the King's temporary madness.

We have mentioned Shakespeare as a parallel to Mr. Phillips for the ease with which he found his tragedies in history. But Mr. Phillips's play is not for all that a play upon the Shakespearian model. There is no rich combination of plot and underplot, no "God's plenty" of characters suggesting the crowded stage of the real world; person after person satisfying us with their admirable humanity as long as they are upon the stage, and giving place to others as thoroughly satisfactory and human. Mr. Phillips has gone for his model to Shakespeare's predecessor, Christopher Marlowe; and we think he was wise in so doing, as indeed, the event has proved him successful. Our tragic stage needs rebuilding; and in building one must begin at the beginning. Before it is possible to deal with a conflict of passions it is well for a dramatist to make sure that he can handle with success a single great passion; and as Marlowe preluded with Dr. Faustus, the adverse fate left the more complicated fugue to his successor, so Mr. Phillips, we hope, has only preluded with

King Herod, and may give us in time his more elaborate harmonies.²⁰

The play opens with a note of warning - beware Aristobulus! Aristobulus, the youthful brother of Queen Mariamne, the idol of the populace who has been raised to high and sacred office by Herod himself to please his queen. A most dramatic and impressive stage scene is presented when the priests and the populace come in dancing and exulting at the close of the Feast of Tabernacles. Mariamne, the beautiful, shows her passionate love for her young brother - the last of the line of the Macabees. As Herod sees all the honors and acclamations bestowed upon the new High Priest, he becomes the sinister Herod torn between two motives - his passion for Mariamne and his murderous hatred of her beloved brother. In quick succession come the news of Antony's death, the bold determination of Herod to go and put himself in the power of the conquering Octavian in order to secure his favor; his reluctant resolution under the pressure of state necessity and unscrupulous counsel to have Aristobulus murdered before he goes; his turning, the order for the murder being given, into the arms of the unsuspecting queen, who never loved him so much as at this moment, and their impassioned leave taking. Herod is helpless in the clutch of circumstances, helpless even in his love. Says Mariamne:

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20. Living Age, CCXXVIII (Jan. 26, 1901), p. 260.

"You rushed on me like fire, and a wind drove you,
 Thou who didst never fear, Herod, my Herod.
 Now clasp me again as thou didst clasp me then,
 When like a hundred lightning brands upsprung
 In the night sudden. Then did you laugh out
 And whirled me like a god through the dark away."²¹

Their farewell is interrupted by the wailing approach of courtiers bringing in the dead brother's body; however, Herod must depart, leaving Marianne stunned with grief. Soon there dawns in her mind a suspicion of Herod's guilt; it is confirmed by Sohemus, whose confession is wrung from him, not by torture, but by Marianne's irresistible charm and beauty.

The second act begins with the return of Herod, exultant with the political success which has attended his tactful handling of Octavius, to find Marianne hopelessly estranged, and his people more mutinous than ever. Marianne accuses him of the murder of her brother, and finally he confesses his guilt. He is soon conscious of the fact that he is hated by her whom he loves most - that never will he be able to win back that alienated love by anything he can ever do or say. The jealousy of Cypres and Salome - mother and sister of the king, has reached such a pitch that they instil in Herod a deep suspicion of Marianne's faithlessness. Also, he resents Marianne's supposed plot to poison him, a plot which is the invention of the same ill-counselling pair; the sight of the public indignation at her wrongs and those of

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21. Stephen Phillips, Herod, p. 42, lines 2 - 7.

her house fill him with renewed apprehension for his throne and state; and finally, the dying cry of Sohemus stings him to further jealousy. All these work with cumulative effect to wring from him in a moment of frenzy an order for Marianne's death. Thus the prophecy is fulfilled that:

"Herod shall famous be o'er all the world,
But he shall kill that thing which most he loves."22

Messengers from Rome enter the palace to announce further additions to his kingdom which are proof of imperial favor bestowed upon Herod. Not realizing that his command has been carried out, he turns calling Marianne to share with her his success:

"Marianne, hear you this? Marianne, see you?
Hippo, Samaria and Gadara,
And high-walled Joppa, and Anthedon,
And Gaza unto these, and Straton's towers!"23

Mr. Phillips's main triumph is in the third act.

The death of the queen has driven Herod distracted; incapable of rule he has wandered off, but now that the frenzy has in part abated he has been persuaded to return and resume his kingly office. He still clings to the delusion that Marianne is not dead but only kept from him; the courtiers and the physician try to postpone the realization of her death as long as possible, fearing that the shock might prove fatal to his life or reason. Upon the question of how to distract his mind and amuse him hangs the greater part of Act Three.

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22. Stephen Phillips, Herod, p. 39, lines 15 - 16.

23. Ibid., p. 95, lines 5 - 8.

The fate of the entire kingdom depends upon the success or failure of the experiment. At last the despairing endeavors of those about him have failed - he commands the presence of the queen. She is brought in - dead. Again, messengers from Rome enter to confer upon Herod honors and new dignities, to find him standing over the corpse of the woman for whose sake alone he courted them; and now they find him motionless and silent, stricken in a cataleptic trance. The drama ends somewhat in the spirit of a Greek tragedy, with words from the physician and priest, lines which might be given by a Greek chorus.

Herod is a great as well as "terrible" figure, a man of ambition and of action, a man quite able to deal with every combination of the involved politics of his time. He is definite and direct, perfectly self-confident, perfectly adaptable to each new necessity, never unready and therefore powerful. But he is in love with Marianne and so much in love with her that she is more important to him than anything else. That in itself is a tragic situation. But in the case of Herod, the situation is further intensified by his own misapprehension. He is keen-sighted in politics but not with women. He does not seem clearly to understand which he loves the better - Marianne or his power. With his

absolute self-confidence he cannot see how a plan of his can go astray; therefore, he orders the death of Marianne's brother. Here he lacks an understanding of human nature; he should have known that such an act would kill Marianne's love for him. He is tricked into commanding her death and then he learns how passionately he loved her.

Marianne, though she has but a few speeches, is clearly and finely conceived. Her love for Herod is passionate, and strong, but her love for her brother, intensified by the pride of race is as strong, or stronger. Note the speech as she forewarns Herod:

"Marianne: Herod, my Herod, such a love as grows
 For you within me, it could never die.
 ... Yet you might kill it.
 ... In a night murder it - in a moment;
 It is so brave you would not hear a cry,
 But -

Herod: If I did such murder then -

Marianne: Ah, then -
 You'd stoop and lift a dead face up to you,
 And pull me out from reeds like one just drowned,
 More dead than those who die; and I should move,
 Go here and there, and words would fall from me.
 But, ah - you'd touch but an embalmed thing.
 Do nothing, Herod, that shall hurt my soul."²⁴

The figure of the king and queen are so vigorously disentangled from their surroundings as to stand out in a relief almost as strong as that of the actors in a Greek tragedy.

The other characters are barely sketched in. They do what they are supposed to do and say what they are supposed to say, for the purpose of action, but they arouse no interest.

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24. Stephen Phillips, Herod, p. 43, lines 13 - 14; p. 44, lines 10, 12 - 18; p. 45, lines 1 - 4.

One critic deals at length upon the characterization, which he considers flimsy:

Apart from Herod and Mariamne, the characters are purely conventional. Mariamne is well enough in her way - a good, savage piece of womankind to woo and quarrel with on a summer's day; her love for Aristobulus is quite what it should be, and her satanic pride is worthy of the old Asmonean lineage of which she so fondly boasts. As for Herod himself, his character is far from consistent or impressive. He is described as the "brain" of Judea, a master of strategy and craft; yet he lets himself be easily bamboozled by evil counsel into two cruel deeds of futile folly - the murders of Aristobulus and Mariamne. These deeds may be historical, but their presentation is not convincing. ... In truth, Herod impresses the reader as far more a man of words than a man of action. ... After the death of Mariamne his frenzied rhetoric takes up almost the entire third act. ... Altogether Herod's character means next to nothing.²⁵

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25. Nation, LXXII (April 25, 1901), p. 343.

In this drama, Mr. Phillips shows himself a poet, a dramatist and a stage craftsman.

There is lyrical effect, an effect of rich beauty. That the quality of the poetry in Mr. Phillips's play is "dramatic in the sense of sharply defining and sustaining the minor individual characteristics of the personages, cannot, I think, be said. Thus Gadias, the old counsellor, begins as what is called a character part, a kind of Polonius - Iago, with ways and tricks of speech of his own, but ends by using a broad generic style and diction like the rest. In a work of this pitch, however, the minor shades of character are of little account, the broad phrases and vehement conflict of passion are all in all; and in delineating these Mr. Phillips shows a full measure of power. To claim for this young poet the divine revealing insight, the gift of flash upon flash illuminating unforeseeably the secret places of the soul, which was Shakespeare's alone, would be absurd: nature does not create two such miracles of power. But of the gifts which have sufficed the general body of dramatic poets, ancient and modern, he has already a large share. He can set forth in ~~a~~ quieter moments, the lyric emotions of a scene with an exquisite imaginative instinct, and in crises of passion can grapple his persons in spiritual conflict with a vivid energy. In the third act, the drama lies chiefly in the unspoken emotion of the standers-by and the fateful suspense that

hangs over the issue: the spoken passions of Herod are mainly lyrical, ranging from the poignant simplicity of the cry -

'But O! O! she must come' -

to the climax of the last invocation: -

' Why, if I am denied the sight of her,
If there hath been mischance to her - I say not
There hath been - yet so fineless is my will,
I'll re-create her out of endless yearning,
And flesh shall cleave to bone, and blood shall run.
Do I not know her, every vein? Can I
Not imitate in furious ecstasy
What God hath coldly made? I'll re-create
My love with bone for bone and vein for vein.
The eyes, the eyes again, the hands, the hair,
And that which I have made, O that shall love me.'

"Corresponding to the play and mood and passion in Mr. Phillips's work is the flexibility and elasticity of his meter. His blank verse joins to the later-Elizabethan love of variation by feminine endings, something of the Miltonic freedom (only permissible to poets of the finest ear and touch) in the matter of elision of syllables and of the occasional suspension and inversion of the regular stresses; but denies itself those Virgilian interlinked cadences and 'solemn planetary wheelings' which Milton loved. These cannot be made dramatically speakable; and Mr. Phillips's verse at its best is eminently suitable to swift, pregnant and various dramatic utterance. He has a good deal yet to do in getting finish and distinction into the lighter and more colloquial passages; but in the impassioned or the lyric moments, his

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verse, alike by music and varied energy, seems a model of what English-spoken blank verse should aim at being."²⁶

The play is by no means merely a gathering of fine phrases, burnished images and telling situations. It has unity and climax and atmosphere: the story moves rapidly from start to finish and at times a genuine note of fate is plainly audible; as in Act One, Herod has started on the downward slant:

"The first step is with us; then all the road,
The long road is with Fate. O horrible!"²⁷

and again at the end of Act Two:

" And it was foretold of me
That I should slay the thing that most I loved.
Fate is upon me with the hour, the word."²⁸

Mr. Beerbohm Tree's venture was a daring one - the venture of presenting "Herod" at Her Majesty's Theatre, London, Oct. 31, 1900. When it is remembered that there had been practically no poetic drama successfully produced on the London stage for many years prior to 1900, only Shakespeare's play, it can be understood with what daring Mr. Tree essayed such an experiment. Also, it is likely that "Herod" appealed to Mr. Tree for the very same reason that made him see his

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26. Fortnightly Review, LXXV (Jan. 1, 1901), p. 185.

27. Stephen Phillips, Herod, p. 35, lines 10 - 11.

28. Ibid., p. 93, lines 9 - 11.

opportunity in the spectacular melodrama of 'The Three Musketeers'. 'Herod', fine dramatic poem or not, gives him the same chance for the ingenious and picturesque 'make up' which is his strong point as an actor. ...The result is the appearance of Mr. Tree looking delightfully like an old Assyrian gentleman from the British museum sculptures, and a spectacle provided with all the appropriate dances and marches and tableaux."²⁹ As Herod, Mr. Tree was powerful, majestic, as Mr. Phillips has said, "the Herod of my dreams."

In its presentation, Mr. Tree made the play an elaborate pageant. "The palace is a stage palace, of no practicable architecture, but its colonnade of solemn-colored Greek and Egyptian marbles, the mystery of the interior, the richness of the gilding ... fit well the historical tradition of Herod as a builder of magnificent and Oriental extravagance. ...In like manner the splendor and variety of the dresses... which body forth beautifully the conception of an Oriental court... For the purpose of accompanying, commenting, or breaking in upon the action, or reflecting the emotions of the chief actors, this many-colored crowd is admirably drilled."³⁰ The entire play is a thing of stage effects - rich, magnificent, too much of a pageant for powerful drama.

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29. Nation, LXXI (November 29, 1900), p. 422.

30. Fortnightly, LXXV (January 1, 1901), pp. 185-186.

According to The Nation volume LIII the play "Herod" leaves in the reader's mind a sense of discontent. Why? The critic writes:

When all is said and done, the play is too clever by half; it is too ingeniously wrought, too craftily engineered. ...The fundamental defects in "Herod" as a tragedy are due to the fact that Mr. Phillips is as yet but an amateur in the art of life. ... Mr. Phillips has apparently done most of his living on the stage, and the experience that he has put into "Herod" is thoroughly conventional and artificial experience, won in regions where art gives law. ...One does not ask from a modern dramatist the wisdom and the moral insight of Shakespeare, or from every modern dramatist the sincerity and the truth of Hauptmann or Ibsen. But surely a tragedy, if it is to be accepted as really worthy art, ought to be a genuine expression of first-hand experience; it ought to bring us close to life. "Herod" does not bring us close to life; it brings us close to Mr. Beerbohm Tree and Her Majesty's Theatre - a charming approximation, doubtless, but hardly one to

justify a drama in claiming high rank, whatever may be the beauties of its diction and imagery and the effectiveness of occasional situations.³¹

In "Herod", Mr. Phillips shows his original weakness in character portrayal intensified. Because he feels this incompetence in character drawing in interpretation of life and wisdom, and in the impress of great personalities, he resorts to exaggerated rhetoric and he allows H. Beerbohm Tree's influence to sway him completely. In "Herod", Mr. Phillips begins the trend toward non-essential spectacular settings - a trend which is not evident in "Paolo and Francesca", but becomes more prominent in the following plays.

The years 1900 to 1902 were years of golden productivity for Mr. Phillips. In 1900 he published "Paolo and Francesca" and produced on the stage "Herod" the drama of great magnificence and grandeur. On February 1, 1902, the drama "Ulysses" was brought forth at Her Majesty's Theatre by H. Beerbohm Tree.

In the third of this series, "Ulysses", the tendency toward the pictorial is very apparent; the drama becomes a panorama and has all the requisites of a great dramatic poem, if not of a great presentable play.

It would be an event in the world of letters if a poet, not lacking in modern thought and feeling should be able to infuse dramatic life into the passive tissues of ancient

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31. The Nation, LXXII (April 25, 1901), pp. 343-344.

folk-lore, and that he should be able to do this, and make it 'reality' without letting in a ray of modernity which might destroy the likeness to the historic and legendary scene he is striving to present. Thus has Mr. Phillips endeavored to weave a number of episodes from Homer's "Odyssey" into a dramatic form. In the "Note by the Author", Mr. Phillips tells something of his attempt to dramatize this famous legend:

The methods and limitations of epic and drama differ completely: and in attempting to write a play on the story and character of Ulysses, as they are known to all the world from the Odyssey of Homer, the first thing needful is to sacrifice five-sixths at least of the episodes which give that poem its enchantment. ...As the reader has perceived, I have gone farther back in the story, and taken in two of Ulysses' earlier trials, the sojourn with Calypso and the visit to Hades, which seemed to me to afford matter for telling dramatic presentment and dramatic contrast. And I have tried to weave these adventures, together with the return to Ithaca and the final discomfiture of the suitors, into the fabric of a properly-knit play.³²

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It is doubtful if Mr. Phillips has justified his choice of a subject, since the story of Ulysses, as handled by him, remains rather a series of more or less dramatic incidents, than a dramatic whole. That it is a dramatic poem of great power, there is no question.

The essential plot of "Ulysses" as it is presented in the play can be summarized as this: how Ulysses returned home and saved Penelope from the Suitors. The action of the plot is practically contained in four scenes. The first two of these - making Act One of the play, contain the exposition: Scene one shows the hero's palace besieged by suitors for the hand of his wife, Penelope. Scene Two shows Calypso's isle where Ulysses, aroused by Hermes, is free at last to make his choice between immortality with the fair enchantress and the adventure homeward. A third scene (in Act Three) shows his landing on Ithaca and his meeting with Telemachus; the fourth presents the mighty fight between Ulysses and the suitors, in the banqueting hall of the palace - and thus the consummation of the hero's hopes. Here in the last scene of all, the shifting spectacle gives place to drama.

In addition to these essential episodes, Mr. Phillips has added two which are structurally dispensable; the prologue which sets forth the contention of the gods on Mount Olympus concerning the return of Ulysses to Ithaca, and his descent into Hades. These added episodes which help round out the

action of Ulysses's wanderings are presented to increase the narrative interest of the play, the first aiding the audience to realize the scheme of things, and the other presenting, in concrete, his resistance to terror.

Viewed as a whole, "Ulysses" is seen to be full of detached beauties and of detached dramatic effects; also there are weaknesses and inadequacies where both dramatic and poetic inspiration seem to fail.

First, consider the two episodes or scenes which are most usually the targets of the critics. It has generally been admitted that the two scenes which are least successful are those on Olympus and in Hades.

The Prologue is the weakest part of the play. It is regrettable that Mr. Phillips did not discard the whole Olympian machinery and deal with the purely human side of the story. "The poem might have lost in picturesqueness, in a masque-like effect of quaintness, but would have gained, one feels, a deeper beauty and significance. At all events, Mr. Phillips has not justified his attempt to walk with the immortals. The author has chosen to make his gods speak in rhymed pentameter, a doubtful vehicle for majestic speech, but one probably selected to give what the Germans call a 'humoresque' touch to the scene. Mr. Phillips, perhaps mistrusting his ability to report 'that large utterance of the early gods',

has preferred to present his divinities in a serio-comic aspect: a permissible alternative, had it been successfully carried out. Unhappily, Mr. Phillips is deficient in both humor and irony, and that 'smile of the universe' which was evidently intended to play over the scene, somehow fails to make itself visible."³³

The descent into Hades is imaginative, but has Mr. Phillips been wise in introducing such spectral appearances? Has he been wise in the substitution of the Hades of the *Ænéid* for that of the *Odyssey*? It may be urged with reason that the scene mars the strict unity of action. "On the other hand it can hardly be denied that the *Well* scene is dramatic, in the sense of being highly effective on the stage, by the power of the poetry and of the spectacle. The strictly dramatic motive of a struggle in the heart of Ulysses against terror and against doubt, though Mr. Phillips does his best to keep it in view, appears only intermittently and then with little force."³⁴

This is a comment by the same critic upon the theatrical effects of this scene in Hades:

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33. Bookman, XV (April 1902) p. 169.

34. Living Age, CCXXXIII (April 12, 1902), p. 68.

When I saw it played for the first time, the opening scene at hell-gate seemed wholly admirable; a thrill of terror came up from the steaming cavern with the wail of strange sounds, and Athene standing in her radiance pointing the way had come to life off some old vase where the Greek artists caught all the movement of Japanese art with a dignity that no Easterner attains. In the Hell scene itself, curiosity itself marred my perception of the poetry till I was caught by the pathos of the child ghosts - an inspiration from Virgil - then by the effect of names ringing through the hollows of hell - "Ithaca" - "Penelope". A second sight of the performance, when the pageant was completed by the tableaux of Tantalus, Prometheus and Sisyphus, still found me doubting, but increasingly caught by the spectacle. As a pageant of the stage I suppose the like has never been seen.³⁵

The characters are suggested, not realized. They pause too often, in their dramatic expression of their thoughts to gather poetical flowers on the way. Poetically, Ulysses is picturesque, interesting and heroic character, but, with

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35. Living Age, CCXXXIII (April 19, 1902), p. 68.

a god or goddess constantly at his elbow, he is virtually deprived of any individuality and initiative; in fact, he is almost reduced to the level of a puppet. References are made to the courage and sagacity of Ulysses, but he is never given an opportunity to show these qualities. Mr. Phillips, it would seem, desired opportunity to display his descriptive talent and he has too little interest in the sorrows and joys of his characters.

The play gives splendid opportunity for theatrical and beautiful panoramic effects. As a pageant of the stage it is probably not excelled. But there is too much lime-light for a powerful drama. Here is inserted a criticism of the staging effects which is written in a humorous vein:

Mr. Stephen Phillips's "Ulysses", which is now running at Her Majesty's Theatre, London, with Mr. Beerbohm Tree in the title role, is a very fine production. It is full of startling surprises and mechanical contrivances of a high order. The first scene represents Mount Olympus.

The gods and goddesses, a rather insignificant-looking company, are seated in a semi-circle, Zeus in the midst. Behind them rises the mountain, wrapped in clouds and grandeur.

Suddenly, a part of the earth at their feet

slides open, Athene ascends, having apparently arrived by a two-penny tube and a private lift of her own. Athene is a magnificent figure in helmet and shield and shining breastplate and spear. ...Athene having reminded Zeus of a few of his peccadilloes again gets into her elevator and descends. The earth closes, darkness comes on, Zeus holds up something in the shape of a cross and strikes it, whereupon it turns crimson, lightning flashes, thunder rolls, and the scene is changed.

Then follows a scene on Calypso's Island, a really beautiful "set". The boat on which Ulysses sets sail is thoroughly well managed, and seems really to sail away, and not hop across the stage in hysterical jerks, and finally appears stationary in the distance, as if to prove that it has really gone.

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Mr. Tree, who looked like an Assyrian has relief, and acted with about as much effectiveness as one would expect from one of those angular-handed gentlemen, descended to Hades for further information as to his fate. Hades was full of shapes who fluttered

realistically about, and looked like a week's wash hung out in the wind to dry.

In the last act Athene comes to Ulysses' aid, and when the lightning flies about with such rapidity that one can almost see the grease on it, it's no use worrying any more. We know that Ulysses has come home and all will be forgiven. Athene retires and they live happily ever after.

For clever stage-management and perfection of scenery and costume, it would be hard to improve on the production at Her Majesty's. The scenes in Hades, Sisyphus and the Stone, Tantalus, Prometheus are striking pictures. The whole thing is largely spectacular, but it is spectacular seriousness.³⁶

Despite the facts that the drama "Ulysses" is somewhat lacking in construction, that it appears to be a mere series of episodes, and that it is, theatrically, a splash- ing of vivid effects, it contains exquisite passages of poetry. In description, nothing has more rich qualities than Ulysses's account of Calypso's isle; excellent are certain lyric outbursts - Penelope's lament for the one

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36. The Critic, XL (June 1902), pp. 519 - 520.

who does not come, and Ulysses's yearning for a human love. In the last act, where poetry and spectacle give way to drama, there are no more stirring lines than those contained in Penelope's repulse of Antinous:

"Splendid Antinous, I tell thee this;
That if my husband on this moment came
In by that door even as yon beggar man,
So bowed, so worn, so ragged and so fallen,
Him would I rather catch unto my heart
And hold his holy ruins in my arms,
Than touch thee in thy glory and thy strength."³⁷

But there is a moment of silence fully as eloquent when the wanderer and his wife, in speechless ecstasy, meet in close embrace. Here Mr. Phillips obeyed an instinct as truly dramatic as it is poetic.

It required some courage to place a poetic drama of this quality on the stage, but it can be recommended as a production of no little artistic and emotional interest.

Eagerness to see Mr. Phillips's first play presented was increased by the success both in the theater (Oct. 31, 1900) and in print (1901) of his "Herod" which Mr. Tree produced with sumptuous accessories. "Ulysses", too, was produced in Her Majesty's Theatre Feb. 1, 1902. When "Paolo Francesca" was at last performed, March 6, 1902, by Sir George Alexander in the St. James Theatre, the author was greeted as the successor of Sophocles and of Shakespeare.

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37. Stephen Phillips, Ulysses, p. 161, lines 6 - 12.

Very seldom has a young man, upon his first entry into the literary world, been so enthusiastically greeted as Mr. Phillips. Take for instance the following sentences culled from the press notices of "Paolo and Francesca" - "It unquestionably places Mr. Phillips in the first rank of modern dramatists and of modern poetry. . It does more, it claims his kinship with the aristocrats of his art; with Sophocles and Dante." Also this by William Archer: "Mr. Phillips has achieved the impossible. Sardou could not have ordered the action more skilfully, Tennyson could not have clothed the passion in words of purer loveliness." This fine bit of hysteria which is only a part of the demonstrative acclaim heaped upon Mr. Phillips was a great burden upon the young poet. What sort of standard was this that Mr. Phillips was asked to live up to? From such a pinnacle there could be no ascent, only decline.

At this time, Stephen Phillips had every kind of literary success. The scholars named him with Dante and Sophocles; the public bought his books and filled the theaters where his dramas were being produced; people who considered poetry spoke of him as an exceptional artist; and his portrait was hung in every book-seller's window in London. He was the man of the hour.

This stupendous and dazzling success, which was in part unjustified, had a most peculiar and perverse influence upon the poet. He seems to have possessed no balancing power, he had nothing to stay his character against such enthusiastic laudations. Indeed, and unhappily, he was one of those unfortunate individuals who are ruined by success. An article in The Bookman LII, Harold Phillips, a brother of the poet, gives evidence that now with more funds at his disposal, Stephen Phillips plunged headlong into excitement of every kind and so lived a life devoted to pleasures and sensuality that his joy as a poet was slowly deadened. Always indolent and careless of his proof-sheets, he now left his producer to fix the fashion of his plays; and Mr. Tree's fashion is known.

After a lapse of several months, during which time Mr. Phillips produced nothing of note, the poetic drama "The Sin of David" was published. It was produced on September 30, 1905, at the Stadttheater, Dusseldorf; in March, 1913, at Johannesburg by H. B. Irving; and in July, 1914, at the Savoy Theatre by H. D. Irving.

In the new play "The Sin of David", Mr. Phillips uses an unoriginal story in an original manner; he invents a modern analogy to the story of David and Uriah, setting his scene in the fen country of England during the Civil

War of 1643. Thus for the first time, Mr. Phillips seeks material near at hand - his previous dramas being modeled upon ancient legends. This, too, in a manner, is an ancient story modernized. "Opinions differ as to the degree of his success. It is significant, however, that even sympathetic critics have expressed regret that in this drama he had not kept to the Biblical story, instead of transposing it into modern terms."³⁸

In this rejuvenation of a Biblical episode, David becomes Sir Hubert Lisle, commander of the Roundhead forces in the Penland; Bathsheba becomes Miriam, wife of Mardyke, an old Puritan officer, who in his turn, is naturally the representative of the ill-fated Uriah.

During the war between the Puritans and Cavaliers, an elderly, harsh Puritan officer, Colonel Mardyke, holds in bonds of subjection rather than in love his young French wife, a maiden who, because of his protection of her as an orphan, has given herself to him as a wife. Miriam, the lovely young wife, warm of heart and almost bursting with the joy of life is cruelly repressed. Sir Hubert Lisle, commander of the Parliamentary forces, a pious officer, arrives at Rushland and falls in love with Miriam - the neglected wife. In time, Miriam returns this feeling of love. In a short time it is the duty of Lisle to send forth a courageous man to defend a

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38. Chandler, Aspects of Modern Drama, p. 388.

strategic position in the war - the obvious outcome of which will be death. After a fearful mental struggle, he sends the husband, Mardyke, who soon shares the fate of the loyal Uriah. And thus Lisle commits the sin of David.

The lovers are married and later a child is born. Five years after the death of Mardyke, Lisle is summoned to the relief of Pomfret; at the same time, his child becomes ill and the general rides forth feeling that the spirit of the dead Mardyke is clutching at the throat of his boy. Sir Hubert wins the battle and returns home - only to find his son dead. The heartbroken mother demands of God to know the reason for this cruel chastisement. Sir Hubert, to clear her conscience and his own, confesses his guilt. At first Miriam is horrified, but by their common grief they are joined in a new and holier union.

There are serious faults to be found with this work - flaws in the handling of the problem and flaws in the delineation of character. The following is a criticism by E. A. Wodehouse:

It will readily be seen that Mr. Phillips has selected a theme of the highest dramatic possibilities. It is of Greek simplicity, and is inspired by the typically Greek idea of Nemesis, that mysterious consummation of a Fate which is higher than the Gods. ...

The cause which sets the retributive destiny moving is a clearly defined act - the sending of Wardyke to his death by Sir Hubert Lisle, in order that he - Sir Hubert - may be able to wed Wardyke's wife, Miriam. Thus the motive of the play is of a naked simplicity which, for its truest artistic exposition, demands a simple and straightforward treatment.

But a simple and straightforward treatment demands, unfortunately, a great artist. Among other qualities, it calls for courage - courage to look the facts in the face without flinching. Mr. Phillips, with sorrow be it said, has flinched.

He has allowed himself to make comfortable explanations which blunt the edge of the problem. This lack of courage on his part I attribute to the limitations of his intellectual grasp of life, and, indirectly, to the conventional attitude which a theatrical training invariably imposes upon its devotees.

Let me now show ... how Mr. Phillips has hedged at the three crucial points of his play.

The first of these points is where Lisle falls in love with Miriam, a married woman; and Miriam, a married woman, responds by

falling in love with Lisle. Of course, from the point of view of accepted social morality, this is a very shocking state of affairs. No hero or heroine must be allowed to act like this without the very strongest excuse. Therefore, Mr. Phillips, as in "Paolo and Francesca", arranges the circumstances of the marriage so that they shall be unendurable to any woman possessed of that sensitiveness and high spirit which we are accustomed to associate with the stage heroine. Whereas there is nothing to show that the original Uriah was not an admirable husband to Bathsheba, Mardyke is presented to us as a bully, hard and unsympathetic, and double his wife's age. ...

Miriam is a woman, and, as a woman, naturally desires to be loved. A husband, like Mardyke, who will trample her necklace under foot and grip her wrist so brutally as to raise a bruise, is obviously intolerable. The audience, whom we suspect Mr. Phillips has ever in his mind's eye, will look forward eagerly to the dissolution of such an ill-assorted match. Consequently, when Mardyke finally disappears, no feeling of pity follows him to his doom. The spectator

feels that he has only got what he deserved.

Thus does Mr. Phillips carpet the way for the love of his hero for another man's wife. The effect on the dramatic situation is to rob it of its poignancy. The cruel husband, on the stage, exists only to be got rid of.

Turning now to the second crucial point of the story - the sending of Kardyke to his death - we find that Mr. Phillips again obscures the issue. In the old biblical narrative, David has no shadow of excuse for his action. "And it came to pass in the morning that David wrote a letter to Joah, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter saying, 'Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten and die.'" Here is the true horror of deliberate murder. Let us now observe how Mr. Phillips tones down the circumstances for his David. A letter comes to Sir Hubert, urgently imploring aid in the attack on Castle Bolingbroke. ... Since then, Lisle is forbidden to volunteer, the task must devolve upon one of the officers

quartered at Rushland House. ...Kardyke, then is the man whom it is Lisle's duty to send in any case. The only other course is for Lisle to go himself. But he has been forbidden to do this in the letter. Consequently, the sending of Kardyke, although to Lisle's guilty conscience the coincidence of wish and opportunity make it seem a crime, is really no crime at all. The only suggestion of crime lies in Lisle's inward wish that Kardyke will never return. How different is this to the scriptural sin of David! David, with cold-blooded cunning, had adapted circumstances to his end. Lisle has the circumstances forced upon him. ...

One more instance of Mr. Phillips's nice concern for his hero. This occurs in the final act of the play, where the expected blow of Nemesis falls upon the wrongdoer. ...The actual sufferer is the infant... This infant dies of a sudden illness five years after the death of Kardyke. Before it dies, however, the poet is at great pains to show us, in the course of a sentimental scene between the parents, how great is their love towards it. His endeavor,

of course, is to prove that the death of the child is fully as severe a blow to Sir Hubert as his own death would have been. But in this he is hardly successful, for the simple reason that the child, owing possibly to extreme youth, has not a single line to utter, and thus cannot enlist our sympathies on his own behalf. ... Thus, at the end of the play, the two chief characters, after successfully making up a difference, which, for the moment, threatens to mar the desired happy ending, go off with every prospect of living, though perhaps at first with a somewhat subdued felicity, happily ever after.

We cannot help feeling, therefore, that Mr. Phillips, in his handling of the uncomfortable subject of punishment, has contrived to make it as comfortable as possible, and that poetic justice has exercised a kindly prudence in the selection of its victim.³⁹

It is firmly believed that Mr. Wodehouse is fair in his criticisms of this play. However, despite these just remarks, "The Sin of David" is a great dramatic poem. It is distinctly better drama than "Ulysses" and "Herod" though it

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39. Fortnightly Review, LXXVIII (April 1, 1905), pp. 833-837.

may be poorer poetry. It lacks the lyrical fervor of the early plays of its author and his purple patches of description; and its modern setting and Puritan atmosphere afford little scope for the gorgeous and panoramic effects of "Ulysses" and "Herod". Nor is there here an excuse for the unreasoned loosing of a passion glorious in its abandon. But here, Mr. Phillips approaches the severity and the simplicity of style which characterizes his first play. There is no attempt to employ spectacular effects, as in the earlier plays. One of the serious defects of the play is the dramatist's lack of courage to face squarely the moral issue involved.

It appears that the peak of Mr. Phillips's popularity came just after the publication of his first play, "Paolo and Francesca." Then he was hailed as the successor of Shakespeare, a second Sophocles, a poet worthy to be placed beside Dante. It was thought that at last the long-looked-for poetic dramatist had appeared to carry on the noble traditions of the Elizabethan stage. Mr. Phillips was naturally encouraged to continue writing plays and in consequence he devoted himself to this branch of art. But from the moment of the production of "Herod", public ardor began to cool. In "Herod" and in "Ulysses" there was a distinct falling off - there was a lack of dramatic power. The public was disappointed. There had been for sometime a growing conviction that the hopes

of literary minded had been misplaced and that Mr. Phillips was not destined to achieve the great plays once predicted of him.

Then in 1904 appeared "The Sin of David", a seventeenth century drama that revived in part the hopes of the public, for in this his touch was more sure and he had returned to the simplicity and directness of his first play. Even with this partial success a glance at the Press notices shows that the poet was no longer greeted with hysterical praise as before. That eagerness of expectation on the part of the public which had been apparent was lacking, and the general tone of the criticism was cooler. The change in valuation was a real change. The decline of Mr. Phillips's popularity was probably owing to a calmer and more mature estimate of his attainments. He was no longer the man of the hour.

The play "Aylmer's Secret" was produced on July 4, 1905 at the Adelphi Theatre; however; it was never published and, in fact, the manuscript was burned by Stephen Phillips.

The next drama "Nero" was published in 1906. It was produced by Beerbohm Tree in Her Majesty's Theatre on January 25, 1906.

Again, Mr. Phillips turns to history for the theme of the drama "Nero". Everyone is well acquainted with the story of Nero, the dreamy, pampered youth who becomes a crazy

author-actor-musician-emperor; the Nero who is unsuccessful in his first attempt at matricide; the Nero, whose burning of Rome constitutes one of the vivid episodes of history. This is the story about which Mr. Phillips weaves his drama. With a sense of the rolling of drums, the tumultuous marching and flashing scenes, the poet reverts to the Marlowesque fashion which he followed in "Herod".

The Roman emperor, like Herod, the Jewish king, is a lyrical personage intoxicated by passion, spurred to crime and suffering a great remorse. Love is only an incident, but lust for power is the prevailing motive with Nero, while with Herod, love for Marianna was a passion more powerful than other motives. Although Nero courts Poppaea and rids himself of her husband, his central struggle is not to win her but rather to rule unchecked by any rival, least of all by the mother who has murdered her husband that her son might be emperor.

In the contention between mother and son lies the tragedy - Agrippina refuses to be cast aside; she will not relinquish her claims to rule her son and through him to rule the kingdom. Warned by his councillors, the Emperor Nero opposes his mother's attempt to seat herself by him when he delivers a response to the embassies from Parthia and from Britain. Publicly he denounces her and asks her with-

drawal to Antium. This so enrages Agrippina that she embraces the cause of Britannicus, the rightful successor to the throne, and starts a public demonstration in his behalf. Nero's counter-stroke is murder - murder of Britannicus on the stage - a Marlowesque, not Greek tradition. At a banquet, given in honor of Agrippina and Britannicus, Nero requests the youthful Britannicus to declaim; at this moment he is given a goblet of wine which soon proves fatal with poisoned snow. Britannicus falls headlong - dead. The banqueters, in an uproar and in confusion, depart from the hall. Agrippina confronts Nero:

"Agrippina: Thou hast done this.

Nero: Mother, I am thy son!"⁴⁰

Nero is now convinced of the necessity of his mother's death, and plans are laid accordingly. A feigned reconciliation, yet was it feigned on the part of Nero, between mother and son takes place before he sends her on a barge upon which there is a leaden canopy poised to crush her.

"Was I all actor then? That which I feigned
I felt, and when it was my cue to kiss her,
The whole of childhood rushed into the kiss.
When it was in my part to cling about her,
I clung about her mad with memories."⁴¹

Nero had hoped for a tumultuous sea and a play of elements to hide his guilt, but nature is serene. After Agrippina departs, and the catastrophe at sea takes place. Nero is overcome with remorse.

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40. Stephen Phillips, Nero, p. 92, lines 3 - 4.

41. Ibid., p. 151, lines 4 - 8.

But Agrippina escapes and reveals herself to Nero. After realizing that the form was not a ghost, he acquiesces in a plan conceived by his counsellors. Agrippina is murdered at the villa across the bay - this scene which was cut out by Mr. Tree is published as a one-act play. The crime is at last accomplished and the prophecy fulfilled that "Nero shall reign but he shall kill his mother."⁴² The remainder of the play is given to the retribution that falls on matricide. As Nero quails beneath successive blows of misfortune, he believes each to be the dead Agrippina's vengeance directed toward him. Poppaea dies; Rome burns, but through this he pays a wild atonement by giving his dead mother flaming Rome for a funeral pyre, believing that only thus may the wrath of his mother's injured spirit be appeased.

In this drama, Mr. Phillips shows that his grasp upon plot construction is weakened; the plot is not handled with genuine mastery for the drama seems to be forced rather than experiencing a natural growth. The acts tend toward the panoramic - spectacular scenes to catch the eye and sounding declamations to gratify the ear. Again, Mr. Phillips repeats one of his favorite devices - the device of prophecy and of fate and makes its use very obvious.

The drama is supposedly a character study of Nero, the pampered youth whose sole passion is to rule the universe,

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42. Stephen Phillips, Nero, p. 144, line 5.

alone. The poet's efforts have been spent, not so much in characterizing this artist-emperor, as in giving utterance to his uncontrolled passion. Nero glories in self-assertion, in self-indulgence and he delights in contriving novel deaths for his enemies and unusual novelties for his court. Though the character-study deals primarily with Nero, the plot interest centers about the mother, Agrippina. "If Agrippina had been given just a trifle more prominence and her name had appeared as the title, we should have felt that the play had a beginning, a middle, and an end; whereas even the most friendly critics must confess that the present play hardly fulfills this modest requirement."⁴³ In this drama, as in former plays, Mr. Phillips deliberately minimized the importance of his minor characters and depicted them accordingly.

Signs of a decline in the dramatic and poetic power of Mr. Phillips may be detected here and there in "Nero." The verse is majestic but again and again he indulges in his besetting passion for rhetoric which masquerades as power but too often fades away into an echo. Mr. Phillips has been compared with Marlowe, and indeed, he has much of Marlowe's virility and much of his comprehensive imagination. But this realm of the poet's imagination grows to almost boundless limits, to ends rhetorical rather than dramatic. The fine account of Agrippina's escape from the barge by swimming makes her an athlete or a dolphin. The poet, for the sake of an effect,

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43. Atlantic Monthly, CII (Nov. 1908), p. 814.

falsifies his picture. Another picture which seems the fervid imagery of Mr. Phillips's is the portrayal of nothing less than a universe in flames for a mother's funeral pyre. There are constant recurrences or rhetorical flourishes in "Hero," that mark the downfall of the poet's poem.

And yet there are lines of pure beauty and of lyric strength. At times, Mr. Phillips is not a singer alone, but also a painter. Here is the lyric cry of the titanic personality, Hero, as he describes his fleet left idle by the disaffection of its crew.

" Sullen droop the sails
Or flop in mutiny against the mast.
Burdened with barnacles the untarred keels,
Drowse on the tide with parching decks unswabbed,
And anchors rusting on inglorious ooze.
All indolent the vast armada tilts,
A leafless resurrection of dead trees."⁴⁴

On January 25, 1906, "Hero" was produced by H. Beerbohm Tree at Her Majesty's Theatre, London. It can easily be imagined that, with Mr. Tree at the helm of theatrical presentation, the drama was a magnificent spectacle. The stage effects were probably as happy and brilliant as modern scenic art and long experience could make them; and no doubt, the danger was that they were too successful and a little of the weakness of "Hero" may be owing to scenic temptation.

From Stephen Gwynn's article "Poetry and the Stage" an account of the production of "Hero" will be taken:

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44. Stephen Phillips, Hero, p. 97 lines 2 - 8.

Reading over "Nero", I wonder at its ineffectiveness on the stage. ... For the first five minutes "Nero" was not meant to be heard. Heard it certainly was not, except in a vague, general way, and the actors evidently acquiesced, since Mr. Fisher White, as Seneca, became completely audible when he had something to say that seemed to him of sufficient importance.

... Broadly speaking, at "Nero" and at "Faust", I made no attempt to attend to the poetry as poetry. Here and there one heard a fine line drift unregarded over the footlights; but it gave me no pleasure; rather a painful sense that good work had been squandered on what might nearly as well be dumb show. ... In "Nero" ... poetry was simply smothered. ... When there was not a continual coming and going on the stage, our eyes were kept busy watching changes on the backcloth - meteors, storms, coming up, and what not. Against the pageant, as a pageant, I say nothing. It was continuous, diverting, at times even beautiful and impressive. But the art of the poet and the art of the actor were both rendered subsidiary to the spectacle.

I maintain that in "Nero" neither the verse as verse nor the play as a play had a chance. What is more, neither had the players. Mr. Tree is an actor who delights me, but neither he nor any one else could dominate that tumult of impressions. If the play had been produced by the same actors without scenery or machinery at all, I believe it would have been extremely moving.⁴⁵

In 1908, a new work by Mr. Phillips appeared - the one act drama "Iole" which was published as a part of his volume "New Poems". This is only a slight creation which did not add to his fame; however, it was produced in 1913. "The Bride of Lammermoor", though unpublished was produced on March 23, 1908, at King's Theatre, Glasgow by Martin Harvey. "The Last Feir" was produced by Harvey at the Adelphi Theatre on October 5, 1908.

Thus for two years, not since the presentation of "Nero" in 1906, had the dramatist given to the public anything that might reinstate him in its esteem. When the report was noised about that Stephen Phillips was working on the immortal theme of "Faust" the people who considered literature became interested - what would Mr. Phillips do with "Faust"? Would he, and, could he, revert to the poetic excellence of that

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45. Living Age, CCLXI (April 3, 1909), pp. 4 - 5; 11; 13.

masterpiece "Paolo and Francesca" and even yet prove to the world that he was the long looked-for artist of poetic drama?

"Faust", the work of the collaborators, Stephen Phillips and J. Comyns Carr appeared in 1908, and with its appearance the hopes of literary critics were dashed to pieces. This work was, after all, an adaptation, as announced on the fly leaf of the volume, - "Freely adapted from Goethe's dramatic poem". This was no original work; it was, virtually, a free translation of Goethe's poem.

The theme is the old, old story which has been modeled and remodeled, told and retold for decades; a theme that seems to belong to Goethe only because he clothed it in a fashion that has made it immortal. It is the story of the virtuous Faust who makes a compact with Mephistopheles, the experiences he undergoes and how at last he is saved by the pure maiden, Margaret, whom he ruined.

This is the story reworked by Mr. Phillips and Mr. Carr, using Goethe as their model. Goethe has been retained where he conforms to the end in view; where not, new matter has been substituted. The end in view obviously being, by means of rearrangements, omissions and additions, of passages to make the resulting adaptation an effective stage play for Mr. H. Beerbohm Tree. The collaborators have made a most readable play.

The poets have omitted much in the delineation of the character of Faust himself, and they make Margaret and Mephistopheles - the human story and the spectacle, more important, comparatively than they are in Goethe. The collaborators' Faust is a much weaker character than Goethe's Faust. In the ending of the first part of Goethe's "Faust", a voice from above declares that Margaret is saved; Mephistopheles disappears with Faust; the dying voice from within is heard faintly calling the lover's name. There is final tragedy. But this is not enough for Mr. Phillips and Mr. Carr. Faust declares that he will follow his lost love:

"Margaret, Margaret! After thee I come
And rush behind thee in thy headlong flight."⁴⁶

In the end when Margaret is seen at the feet of Raphael, Mephistopheles claims his wager won, but an angel declares that Faust has been ennobled by a higher, holier love springing from his sin, and "angles are seen bearing the soul of Faust upward toward Margaret." Thus is the new Faust transported to the heavenly joys in a moment of wild agony and self-reproach. This man has chosen the easiest ways; has dragged a maiden to her grave of shame; has been responsible for the murder of her mother, the drowning of her child, the death of her brother; but because of her nobility and purity, and because of a bitter repentance, lasting but a moment, he shall

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46. Stephen Phillips, Faust, p. 137, lines 9 - 10.

be saved. This seems contrary to the best spirit of the ages and to eternal truth; Faust should live, and suffer, and serve his fellow men.

Despite this criticism, the human story and the spectacle - Margaret and Mephistopheles - which give the dramatic poem the unity it has and which make it moving and entertaining, are the very parts that Mr. Phillips and Mr. Carr have kept and emphasized. Their task was special and they have performed it admirably.

However much the lover of Goethe may resent these tamperings with the "immortal "Faust", the two collaborators have succeeded with the blank verse which they have substituted for the original meters. Many of the added lines possess much beauty, and much of the love story grips the reader with its pathos.

In the Prologue before Mephistopheles appears to seek permission for the seduction of man from his obedience to heaven, occurs this lovely song of the archangels:

"By angels, though uncomprehended,
Strength from Thy aspect still is drawn;
The Universe abideth splendid,
And fresh as at Creation's dawn."⁴⁷

The first speech of Mephistopheles is in a stately blank verse that resembles that of Milton's; the second shows some of the grace and spirit of Goethe. With a mastery of light and easy blank verse deftly modulated, there is now and then a

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47. Stephen Phillips, Faust, p. X, lines 11-14.

heroic strain with a full Shakespearan breadth of swing as represented in the speech in which Faust closes the bargain which gives the devil a strong soul, unless:

"If from all Time one moment thou canst pluck
So rich in beauty that my soul shall cry
Tarry! thou art so fair! --
Then shalt thou claim the immortal part in me!
Then let Time's beating pulses cease to stir:
The shattered hands upon the dial's face
Fling down into the dust: their use is gone,
And Hell itself shall toll the final hour.
So stands my challenge!"⁴⁸

It seems that the real purpose of this version of "Faust" was to make an effective stage play for Beerbohm Tree. It cannot be doubted that Mr. Tree would make an excellent Mephistopheles. Reports from London confirm that neither poet nor actor were mistaken in their estimate of a new Faust as a theatrical success:

At the end of the prologue the machines and prospects have a chance; Mephistopheles, amid thunder and darkness, with wings outspread swoops suddenly like lightning downwards to the earth. ...Faust, recalled from his suicidal attempt, remembers that seeking the light he has not yet called upon darkness. He raises the sign of the hexagon, speaks his formula; a flame leaps in the hollow of the chimney, followed by a vapor from which emerges the

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48. Stephen Phillips, Faust, p. 17, lines 10 - 18.

form of his future friend and tempter. ...

The compact is soon made, the student is disposed of in a few lines, and, accompanied by a roll of thunder, the pair are whisked away to emerge in a "world of cloud and vapor".

When the clouds have disappeared, we do not find the two travellers in Auerbach's Keller or the Witches' Kitchen, but on a ledge of rock looking into a deep torn fissure in the earth, in whose depths is the Witches' Cavern. ...Faust drinks the witches'

cup, thunder crashes, there is a blinding flash of lightning, after which the rejuvenated Faust stands forth clad in rich garments. ...The spectacular side of the adaptation cannot fail to satisfy the most insatiable appetite for "thrills". ...

Here was good opportunity for carpentry and colored lights. The very stage directions make the reader shudder.⁴⁹

And so "Faust," however well suited to the histrionic needs of Mr. Beerbohm Tree and a success as a theatrical display, is of minor importance when considered as a contribution to literature.

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49. The Dial, XLVI (March 16, 1909), pp. 188 - 189.

This new diluted version of "Faust" is all the dramatic work Mr. Phillips has to show for the many months following the publication of "Herod".

Here is a critical comment written in September 1908, shortly after the production of "Faust", which shows some of the disappointment of the public:

The present work, therefore, gives countenance to those critics who coming to believe with sorrow that Mr. Phillips is not likely to fulfill the high promise he revealed in his earliest and freshest efforts. ... At that moment (after Herod) Mr. Phillips needed only to march forward to assume dominion over the contemporary English drama, and to don the mantle of English poetry shed in dying by the laureate Tennyson. The public applauded him; the critics believed in him: and he needed only to work and win. But instead of fulfilling the high promise of his youth, he has dropped downward lazily from year to year. His later plays have been more and more disappointing; his later poems have been merely imitations of his young inspiring productions. Now at last he gives us merely a condensed paraphrase

of a great work, written with none of his original reverberating eloquence: he takes his money from the actor-manager, and asks us not to care.⁵⁰

After the disappointing "Faust", staged on September 5, 1908, in Her Majesty's Theatre, Mr. Phillips passed out of sight until the publication of "Pietro of Siena" in 1910 and its production October 10, 1911, at the Studio Theatre by the Drama Society.

The story of "Pietro of Siena" combines the themes of Shakespeare's "Measure for Measure" and Maeterlinck's "Monna Vanna." Pietro Tornelli, the rightful successor to the rule of Siena captures the city and condemns to death the tyrant, Luigi Gonzaga, who happens also to be of a rival family. Upon the first sight of Gemma, Luigi's lovely sister, Pietro becomes enamoured of her and allows her to weaken his decision concerning the brother's death on the morrow. In a fit of passion he resolves to possess her. He sends her a message that the life of her brother will be spared if she will yield to him her honor. Gemma is aghast, and against her will, Caterina an aged nurse, urges her to go to Pietro; at last, fearing that her brother will be lost if called at once to the bar of Heaven with all his sins upon his head, Gemma consents.

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50. The Forum, XL (September 1908), pp. 223 - 224.

At midnight Gemma is ushered into the presence of Pietro and after a few words threatens to commit suicide. However, this action is arrested. In her single speech she converts Pietro. Instantly he veers from wickedness to virtue; he commands the release of Luigi and offers himself to Gemma as a true and loyal husband. She, as instantly, professes love for him, though she has seen him but once before and has known him only as a despicable rake. Luigi, the brother, makes protest; he feels that his life has been purchased for the price of his sister's purity; and thus he loathes her as well as his own life. However, when explanations are made, Luigi is delighted, he will not refuse life; the feud between the two houses is at an end and Siena is at peace.

In this drama the fall from power is amazing. The mark of decline is not merely a disassociation of rhetoric from drama; it is, in fact, an actual flourish of rhetoric itself and a total dramatic ineffectiveness. A major part of the ineffectiveness is due to a decline in the power of character delineation and in the improbability in the turn of the plot.

Pietro is made with an astounding flexibility of character that can, upon the slightest provocation, enable him to turn from wickedness to extreme goodness in an instant's notice. In two minutes and after the second speech he has

ever heard Gemma utter he changes from a tyrant to a suppliant suitor. There is no growth of character here, there is no growth of morality, his infatuation accomplishes the trick. One almost doubts the sincerity of his conversion.

As for Gemma, she is equally unreal in motive and in deed. That so pious a maiden should so quickly be reconciled to her shame and on so weak a protest is incredible and unexpected on the stage as well as in life. In her plea to Pietro she is not concerned with morality and common humanity, instead, she merely reminds him that he cannot expect to possess her soul - a flimsy argument to move so desperate a man.

It is not with subtlety and truth that Mr. Phillips makes plausible the regeneration of Pietro and Gemma's rapid growth of love for him. Mr. Phillips has not faced life and truth and love squarely as have Maeterlinck and Shakespeare in the same theme.

Here and there the author plucks the string of lyric beauty in the lines, but not as frequently as in his preceding plays. The old poetic eloquence is heard only once with its peculiar power, and that occurs at the opening of the third act as Luigi, condemned to die at sunrise, laments that he must pass into darkness while all else brightens with the dawn.

And so there are heard only feeble echoes of his first and best play. Mr. Phillips's day is almost over. But again, he tries his waning skill on one act plays - "The

"King" and "The Adversary", 1912, which appeared in the volume "Lyrics and Dramas". Both of these plays were to have been produced by the Dramatic Society but Mr. Tree acquired "The King" and died before producing it.

For the last time, Mr. Phillips attempted to re-establish himself. In 1915 "Armageddon" appeared in print and was produced on June 1, 1915, at the New Theatre by Martin Harvey.

For the first time in his dramatic career, Mr. Phillips chose a modern theme - the World War. "Armageddon", a war drama, is made up of a series of episodes bracketed between a prologue and an epilogue in Hell. The prologue introduces Satan in council with his peers; Satan having failed in his design to win the world by craft, dispatches the spirit of Attila to earth determined to conquer the planet.

The first episode shows the bombardment of Rheims Cathedral by German forces, in spite of pleadings of the Abbe of Rheims that it be spared:

"If Rheims Cathedral you must batter down,
 You batter no mere mass of masonry;
 You burn the body of an eternal soul.
 They who did build so high they feared not time;
 They feared not man, and now shall man erase
 This thought unchanging in the drift of change;
 This Prayer that ever-rising still abides;
 This Rally of the Soul in days of dross,
 With windows rose-flushed from heroic dawns;
 A Vision frozen, stationary Sigh,
 Time-worn, yet wearying t'ward Eternity."51

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51. Stephen Phillips, Armageddon, p. 32, lines 12 - 14; p. 33, lines 1 - 8.

But Trenk, who has been drinking heavily is unyielding and scoffs at the saintly abbe. In the end, the carousing German officers are annihilated by a French asphyxiating shell.

The second scene takes place in an English orchard; here the mother and sweetheart of a British soldier hear of the death of the son and lover. The contrasted griefs of mother and betrothed are depicted with some exquisite verse. The passage is a fine tribute to the noble spirit of bereaved and patriotic womanhood.

The third scene is that of a German press bureau - a farcical scene which portrays the effort on the part of German officials to feed their people on lies.

And finally, there is a scene at Cologne as the allied army forces its way into that territory. The French and Belgian generals would exact penalty upon Cologne - an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; in atonement for the destruction of Rheims Cathedral, they would lay in ruins the Cathedral of Cologne. They are restrained by the British commander who pleads that they are fighting for the great cause of freedom and liberty, not for revenge. However, when he hears of the death of his son and the mutilation of the body, he wavers and asks for time for reflection. During this absence, the French general sees a vision of Joan of Arc who also pleads that they forget expiation and revenge:

"Nations, at times, as men, may nobler stand,
And finer in refusal than in act.
Have I not seen the very stars in Heaven
Flash all together at some splendid "No"?

...
Because they ruined Rheims, spare ye Cologne!"⁵²

And so destruction is foregone.

In a brief Epilogue in Hell, Attila reports to Satan that he has encountered a strange influence, a power that is not Force, but stronger than Force:

"And soft as summer overcoming me.
No face, no form I see, unless at times
The flitting vision of an armed maid;
I feel this presence, understand it not."⁵³

As a soft light from above falls upon him, the Prince of Darkness, in a bold and striking paraphrase cries:

"My Power, my Power, why art thou leaving me?"⁵⁴

Thus Mr. Phillips reserves the greatest conception for the end, when this Prince, himself, at last feels the overmastering power of the spirit of Christian sacrifice.

To the title of drama "Armageddon" has small claim. At most, it is only a series of dramatic episodes with no unifying plot. The episodes would constitute effective tableaux in the melodramatic theater, but they are dangerously akin to sensationalism, especially the first scene. The final scene, that in which Joan of Arc appears, is the most dramatic of the entire piece.

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52. Stephen Phillips, Armageddon, p. 84, lines 16 - 18; p. 85, lines 1, 5.

53. Ibid., p. 90, lines 5 - 8.

54. Ibid., p. 91, line 15.

A review of the play, published on June 12, 1915, gives this criticism:

We expected Mr. Stephen Phillips to get nearer success than he does in "Armageddon", produced last week at the New Theatre. In our opinion he starts by failing to make up his own mind as to the particular mental phase which must bear the largest share of guilt for the war. ...Instead of working his tragedy out as one might expect, on a basis of the action of blind force, Mr. Phillips more than once admits that the Allies are fighting an ideal which seeks to impose by force a domination spiritually conceived. ...In other words, he admits, as he must, that never before has the spirit of evil so craftily sown tares, which, falling on ground more suitable for the cultivation of evil than good, have speedily strangled the growth of the better seed. Through out the play he appears to fear lest he should estrange public opinion by admitting the possibility of anything good in our enemies. His German soldiers are not allowed to be soldier-like, except in the case of one private who spares a minute

to urge some women to fly with him before the advance of the Allies. They are all made swine-like, not only in manner, but also in appearance.⁵⁵

Mr. William Archer says: Mr. Martin Harvey has produced, under the ominous title of "Armageddon", a "modern epic drama" by Mr. Stephen Phillips, which admirers of that poet - I can speak for one of them - will make all possible haste to forget. It is inspired not by any high sense of historic crisis, but simply by the common catch words of the war. It does not stimulate thought or purify emotion, but merely gives violent utterance to the sentiments of the man in the street - just sentiments in many cases, but made no juster by being bellowed through a megaphone.⁵⁶

This play is a weak repetition of the sentimentalism and falsification of truth that is evident in "The Sin of David." This weakness can be traced from the poet's first drama through all his dramatic works to the end. This failure to present life truly and this failure to face issues with moral courage increase during the dramatist's career and is a very real reason for his loss of power.

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55. The Athenaeum, 1915 Jan. - June, (June 12, 1915), p. 535.

56. The Nation, CI (July 1, 1915), pp. 25 - 26.

The play "Harold" which appeared in the "Poetry Review" of January and March 1916, after the author's death, was not produced.

In a brief resumé, it is found that Mr. Stephen Phillips could and did choose excellent dramatic material, that he had it within his power to weave a strong plot, that he could make a character live, that he could write beautiful verse, and that he was a thorough master of stage craft. While he had it within his power to execute all this technique of drama making, he did not always fulfill the promise of mastery that he possessed - and therein lies the tragedy of his dramatic career.

Mr. Phillips followed the traditions of the Greek stage more closely than those of the Elizabethan; where he aimed at unity and at the strong delineation of one or two outstanding characters, the Elizabethans sought for multiplicity of effect. He reduced action to its simplest terms and he cared nothing for the complications of intrigue as he was primarily concerned with the esthetic expression of a few emotions. His plots, too, are simple, thus differing from the Elizabethans.

The great dramatist will make plot and character interweave and fuse until they become one; in this welding, Mr. Phillips has not betrayed a weak hand. He had been

true to his Greek training in choosing to bring about a satisfying union of plot and character by the introduction of the figure Fate whose presence is continually felt through out all of his plays. This, perhaps, is one of his faults as he resorted to this device with dangerous freedom. In "Paolo and Francesca" there are the visions of Angela and the warnings of Lucrezia; in "Herod", the predictions of the astrologer; in "Ulysses", the council of the Olympian gods and its decision; in "The Sin of David", it is the self-righteous prayer of Lisle after he condemns Joyce to death; in "Nero", it is again the astrologer; in "Faust", the agreement between Mephistopheles and the angel for Faust's soul; and in "Armageddon" the sending forth of Attila's spirit by Satan. In addition to using these more or less general predictions, Mr. Phillips fairly toys with the future at every turn.

In electing to follow the course of the Greek tradition, Mr. Phillips incurred the charge of placing only wire-controlled puppets upon the stage. This may be true to a certain extent, but perhaps his characters are no more wire-controlled than people in life who prate so eloquently about being masters of their fates and captains of their souls. For instance, if Francesca 'who hath wondered up at the white clouds' could have wedded Paolo, they must still have known sorrow, for that is the lot of humanity.

As a young dramatist, Mr. Phillips possessed, in a certain degree, a sense of character and some insight into motive. His dramatic genius was intense but of a very limited range. He could invest a human relationship under circumstances essentially simple, and his poetic vitality was of lyrical purity; but he became confused and considered violence as power. His finest dramas are those in which an ancient story and an older world are used in order to exhibit such elemental impulses as still determine humanity. Outside the field of this chosen theme he lacked artistic pliability and moral strength. The truth is that Mr. Phillips possessed little critical power and essentially no sense of self-criticism.

In considering the language and verse of Mr. Phillips's dramas, there are the fewest differences of opinion. It is true that there are many prosaic lines and many rhetorical flourishes. His last plays fall under this category - "Nero", "Pietro of Siena", "Armageddon". Again and again he indulged in his passion for rhetoric, for large words and larger symbols, for comets, for flowers, flames, desolation, until there was little left of the lyric music of his early days. In his later dramas it appears that he had ceased to think and was content with the showiest word that stood ready for his purpose.

Written by an actor, the poet's plays reveal their dramatic content. Much is subordinated to the action. In the type of poetic drama he has presented, Mr. Stephen Phillips broke away from the traditional path in which the English writers of lyric drama had so long followed. In his unified and direct presentation he excelled his predecessors in poetic drama - Tennyson, Swinburne, Browning. Lesser than they as a poet, he showed himself an abler master of the art of writing an acting play.

The truth of the matter seems to be that Mr. Phillips is a lyrical poet with a very exceptional gift - he is greater as a poet than as a dramatist. "Herein he seems to follow a long line of honorable predecessors from AEschylus to Shakespeare; for the law of progress seems to be that tragic poets shall be poets before developing into great writers of tragedy. Their lips must have power to sing before their hands have skill to paint or carve figures from life. ...One catches now and then an echo from some of the teachers at whose feet our poet has sat in patient learning: but there is absolutely no sign of the mere copyist. ...When a metrical passage makes itself a beautiful concomitant of one's thoughts on a great theme, it is safe to speak of it as high poetry."⁵⁷ And Mr. Phillips's dramas abound with passages of illuminating vision, imaginative power and impassioned strength.

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57. Atlantic Monthly, CII (December 1908), pp. 818 - 819.

Mr. Phillips never gained complete mastery over the lighter portions of the dialogue and this constitutes one of his weaknesses. But it is not doubted that he was successful in his lyric outbursts. It must be considered a misfortune for his fame that he accomplished almost nothing as a lyricist, as there is nothing like lyrical poetry to keep a name alive.

In concluding, the comments by Professor Chandler concerning this chief exponent of the English poetic drama, will be quoted:

The best of his plays have succeeded by reason of their spectacle, their single scenes of dramatic and theatrical power, and their passages of sweet or gorgeous poetry. In combining these three elements, Phillips has been peculiarly happy. His spectacles have satisfied a well-defined taste of the time - the liking for exotic costumes and settings by way of relief from the sober trappings of the realistic stage. His scenes of dramatic conflict have almost always compelled attention and stirred the emotions theatrically, even when proceeding from manifest prearrangement by the playwright rather than from the inevitable action of

character upon character. And his verse, by its grace, color, music, and capacity for kindling the imagination, has supplied a want long felt - that yearning for a beauty now so largely banished from the boards, or else relegated to opera.

Those who have witnessed the plays of Phillips have enjoyed a sense of escape from the commonplace into a world of noble phrases and great passions. They have not been called upon to think, so much as to feel and to admire. They have been disturbed by no new ideas, no vexed problems clamoring to be solved. They have received, instead, a heightened sense of life from observing the operation of love, jealousy, and ambition in intense but simple natures.⁵⁸

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58. Chandler, Frank Wadleigh, Aspects of Modern Drama, p. 393.

Chapter Five.

The Philosophy of Stephen Phillips.

"Lo! friends, one leans above me as I die,
The tender aspect of my conqueror."

The Passing of Julian. Lines 44-45.

Chapter Five.

The Philosophy of Stephen Phillips.

Every one has some philosophy of life, whether he is a poet or a layman. Though the common folk may not label their attitudes and ideas of life as philosophy, this powerful influence - philosophy - plays its part, and its role on the stage of life is indispensable. This is the special prerogative of the poet. The poet has the vision to see in common things meanings which they have for his poet's mind, and he has the gift and the power to make other men sharers in some measure of the vision which delights his own soul. This vision, or interpretative imagination, has the power to pierce through the outer husk of things into the inner reality; this beauty and music find echoes in the poet's heart and these echoes reach the world through his verse. A poet teaches only by hints and parables and brief flashes of thought, his interpretations of man and of his life, and this is, in truth, his - the poet's - philosophy of life.

"No man," wrote Coleridge, "was ever yet a great poet without being at the same time a profound philosopher."¹

The young man, Stephen Phillips, was a poet and a philosopher. Mr. Phillips was not an ordinary man, but like most poets, he was more often a spirit with the strangest,

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1. Brown, Stephen J., The Realm of Poetry, p. 119.
Footnote from Biographia Literaria.

the most vibrating, as well as the most irritable of moods. By nature, he was open, hearty, and sociable except when afflicted by recurrent fits of depression. Always of a melancholic turn of mind, he was often the victim of utter melancholy, baffling in its torture. He felt, even as a youth, his life to be a losing struggle against a destiny which was himself; indeed, this was the theme of his earliest poem, written when he was fifteen, and it appears as a sad strain of music always coloring his poems. This line from "Harold before Senlac" is so very characteristic of Stephen Phillips himself, that it must be the author speaking - not Harold:

"I stand, it seems, in the great path of Fate."²

In the waning light of his popularity as a poetic dramatist, Mr. Phillips essayed a reconstruction through the lyric form of poetry and was partially successful. In these poems is found a tragic mood, the mood of a man who faces defeat with little hope and for whom the world's familiar things - the lights in the sky, the early song of birds, the beat of the sea - have become the haunting themes. Defeat and loss are acknowledged, but life is not made to appear cheap and mean. The poet, looking sadly on the world, sees it filled, not with deceptive and passing, but with grave and permanent values. Even in the face of defeat, the poet cannot lose faith in life's beauty and significance; he continues to look, not down, but up.

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2. Stephen Phillips, Panama and Other Poems, p. 31, line 3.

Mr. Phillips possessed a poetic way of looking at things: he had an interpretative sympathy and a fine imaginative insight which pierced the surface of things and went straight to the heart of them. His poetry is essentially a thoughtful poetry: its chief beauty is that of dramatic truth.

The poetic nature, by the very law of its being, vibrates between the pain of life and the joy of life. Mr. Phillips's whole being is attuned with unerring certainty to the stimulus of the former. In his works, he shows an imagination alive and tingling with the processes of life, a mind not merely serious, but tragic in its cast, drawn to the soul of sorrow in things, and understanding to the fullest extent, the desperate issues of human existence. His finest dramas are those in which an ancient story and an older world are used in order to exhibit the elemental impulses which still determine the common lot of humanity. If he retells the old Greek myths of Marpessa or of Ephyra, it is to read new and human meanings into them. There are pieces - "The Wife", "The Woman with a Dead Soul" - in which Mr. Phillips turns into poetry scenes of everyday life and casual tragedy among the crowded humanity of the London streets. Here he is especially interested in the conduct of human souls when they have put off the daily mask and reveal themselves under the stress of some over-mastering emotion; he can interpret vividly the impression of a life history stamped in a passing

face in a crowd - as in "Faces at a Fire"; he can portray the tragic significance of crises in the lives of his characters and holdly depict the seamy side of life.

Even as Mr. Phillips felt his own life to be a losing struggle against a destiny which was himself - a destiny whose course was marked out and directed by Fate -, so his readers are keenly aware of the presence of Fate hovering very near, in all his dramas and in many of his poems. Fate so controls the themes of his dramas that, although his characters struggle for self assertion and independence, their struggle is futile.

Fate prompts the first step; it is Fate that causes the character to be placed in some situation, in some environment, or in a certain attitude. This first step is just the beginning of a different slant, and though the first step appears providential, it is only the working of Fate.

"The first step is with us: then all the road,
The long road is with Fate. O horrible!"³

After the first step, Fate directs: and though there may be a struggle, such an attempt to readjust is futile, and the character must accept the consequences which are sorrow, and remorse, and finally, death.

Fate is overpowering, overwhelming: it is a force that rules humanity as with rods:

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3. Stephen Phillips, Herod, p. 35, lines 10 - 11.

"we cannot run from Destiny".⁴

This philosophy of melancholy will, eventually, tincture one's attitudes, one's purposes, even one's life and soul with a fatalism that is deadly in its poisonous effects. This is a tragedy of the poet's life. When he realized that the public had rejected him as a failure, he tried to reconstruct his outlook on life, but the struggle was not successful. To counteract these fatalistic forces he relied more and more on religion for consolation and comfort; so the streams of fatalistic tendencies and of religious thought are found flowing side by side, and converging in many cases - Fate the more prominent in his dramas, and a belief in an Infinite Power of goodness and love outstanding in his poems. These conflicts suggest a lack of intellectual integrity on the part of the poet.

A large place is occupied in his verse by the more obvious, the more comprehensively human pain of regret for personal loss, for death. Death and the life after death are stimulants to his imagination. It seems that he sits and muses with eyes half closed, and lo! the dead past gives up its dead - dead no longer, but living with a kind of reality:

.....

4. Stephen Phillips, Poems, p. 57, line 2.

"Dreams can bring me back the dead;
I with thee again may tread,
As of old with thee I walk,
Still in the olden garden talk."⁵

In "Beautiful Death", Mr. Phillips deliberately cites the problem of death and would find consolation in the fancy that the dead, unseen, silently are working for the living, and have become a part of all the sweet earthly influences:

"Why darest thou the calm process of death?

Yet Death is full of leisure, and of light;
Of compensations and of huge amends.
Since all the dead do for the living toil,
Assisting, battling, in the air, the earth;"⁶

There seems to be a conflict of emotions concerning death. At times, Mr. Phillips, like any normal, happy human being treasures life and with a supreme effort battles for it and longs for a world where Death is not. Occasionally he has his characters speak as Joyce does:

"I do not count death as a little thing.
I cannot go out of the warm sunshine
Easily; yet I am a gentleman
And I can die."⁷

and Luigi, as he faces death at dawn:

"The dawn, the dawn! Now when all wakes to
life,
I wake to death, when all revives, I die.
This freshness and the coming color make
The faint grave worse. Oh, but to die at dawn!

.....

5. Stephen Phillips, Lyrics and Dramas, p. 81, lines 1 - 4.

6. Stephen Phillips, Poems, p. 58, lines 1, 5 - 8.

7. Stephen Phillips, Sin of David, p. 35, lines 1 - 4.

Life, life begins! And this hour must I die.

Life! life! I cannot die, I dare not die."⁸

Although often, a melancholy chord is struck; he accepts Death as full of leisure and of light, and he yearns for Death's tremendous liberty.

Mr. Phillips's belief in immortality tints all his works with a tinge of hopefulness; he conceives of an after life and a glory on the other side of the grave; he accepts the philosophy that there will be a kingdom, a spirit throne, a city of the soul.

There is a transcendental thought permeating his work - the thought that behind the invisible world is the reality made by the mind, as when Faust speaks:

"Our hooded vision vainly seeks to pierce
What lies beyond the ruin of this Earth."⁹

He feels the presence of an innumerable throng of souls, now dead, that peers upon the world through the eyes of the living. Individuals may have thoughts of their own, but it is more likely that those thoughts are the thoughts of the souls now dead:

"But ah, through thine eyes unnumbered
dead ones are peering;

So through tears not our own is the sunset
strangely pathetic;
And splendid with thoughts not our own.

.....

8. Stephen Phillips, Pietro of Siena, p. 39, lines 1 - 4;
p. 41, lines 12, 19.

9. Stephen Phillips, Faust, p. 16, lines 6 - 7.

...
 O never alone can we gaze on the blue and
 the greenness;
 Others are gazing and sigh:
 And never alone can we listen to twilight
 music:
 Others listen and weep."¹⁰

Again and again the thought crops out that an individual is acquainted only with the sorrows of ancients, of the people who lived long ago:

" What is it to be sad?
 Nothing hath grieved me yet but ancient woes,
 Sea-perils, or some long-ago farewell,
 Or the last sunset cry of wounded kings.
 I have wept but on the pages of a book,
 And I have longed for sorrow of my own."¹¹

With this there comes an awareness of grief as a force that moulds and softens mankind.

Grief cannot be evaded; it is a cleansing given as a gift to God's beloved; it is a chastening that prepares the soul for a fuller and deeper companionship with the Master:

"He, as I think, intends that we shall rise
 Only through pain into His Paradise.

...
 So fear not grief, fear not the anguish, thou,
 The paining heart, the clasped and prostrate brow;
 This is the emblem, and this is the sign
 By which God singles thee for fields divine;
 From such a height He stoops, from such a bliss,
 Small wonder thou dost shudder at His kiss."¹²

.....

10. Stephen Phillips, New Poems, p. 92, lines 3, 9 - 10,
 p. 93, lines 5 - 8.

11. Stephen Phillips, Paolo and Francesca, p. 16, lines 13 - 15,
 p. 17, lines 1 - 3.

12. Stephen Phillips, New Poems, p. 18, lines 6 - 7; p. 21,
 lines 4 - 9.

Between the religious spirit and Mr. Phillips's spirit of poetry there exists some special kinship - there are appeals to the human in man, to man's relation with man, and to man's relation to an Infinite Presence. There is a sense of a power in the universe - a power which is the presence and the operation of an Infinite Mind.

Witness these lines in "To Milton - Blind". A trust is placed in the wisdom of God who would cause blindness to come upon the poet so that he might better see the whole:

"He who said suddenly, 'Let there be light!'
To thee the dark deliberately gave;
That those full eyes might undistracted be
By this beguiling show of sky and field,
This brilliance, that so lures us from the Truth."¹³

The same thought is expressed in "The Eve of Darkness" when General Booth is threatened with an entire loss of sight.

Stephen Phillips slips boldly out from the confining walls of the materialistic world and looks up into the stars, into the hearts of men, into his own heart, confident of a far-off dawn, confident of a God who has led men's thoughts for so many aeons and will continue to direct until Eternity.

"In the years that have been I have bound
 men closer to man,
And closer woman to woman;
And the stranger hath seen in a stranger his
 brother at last,
And a sister in eyes that were strange.

.....

13. Stephen Phillips, Poems, p. 43, lines 1 - 5.

In the years that shall be I will bind me
 nation to nation
 And shore unto shore: saith our God.

...

'Let them look to the inward things, to the
 searching of spirit,
 And cease from boasting and noise.'

...

Lo! I am the bonder and knitter together of
 spirits,
 I dispense with nations and shores.'

....

Lo! I am the burster of bonds and the breaker
 of barriers -
 I am He that shall free', saith the Lord."¹⁴

Was the poet a prophet or a seer when he wrote these lines? Surely, the belief in a world peace and in the fellowship, even a brotherhood of God's children, is a belief worthy of meditation and acceptance: it can grow into a conviction so strong in its power that an overthrow of Force will be inevitable and Peace will become supreme.

"Shall man in Force or Faith discover Life?"¹⁵

There is a personal relationship between the poet and his God. The poet is aware of the Presence that dominates his course:

.....

14. Stephen Phillips, New Poems, p. 32, lines 8 - 11; p. 33, lines 1 - 2; p. 34, lines 10 - 11; p. 35, lines 6 - 7; p. 39, lines 11 - 12.

15. Stephen Phillips, Panama and Other Poems, p. 94, line 8.

" Perhaps the quiet face
Of God: the eternal Listener is near."16

"That I have felt the rushing wind of Thee:

Beautiful Power, I praise Thee:

Sustain me in that hour with Thy left hand,
And aid me, when I cease to soar, to stand;
Make me Thy athlete even in my bed,
Thy girded runner though the course be sped:
Still to refrain that I may more bestow,
From sternness to a larger sweetness grow."17

One can almost hear the voice of the author of "Hebrews", as he speaks "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith."

Our poet pierces keenly into the seething life around him and into the seething self within him and feels the contrast of what is with what might be, if humanity would allow the risen Galilean to walk with it, side by side, day by day. But mankind ever pushes away the Presence, saddening the heart of God who cares and grieves:

"All these are perfect, yet he hears afar,
In that dim, little planet that he loves,
Man jarring ever on his harmonies,
Aye, yearning in his cold and perfect worlds
For Man who might have sympathy with him,
Move with conceptions vast and burning thoughts
From beauty unto beauty, peopling worlds,
He grieves, though not the less a God for grief,
Man is all out of tune with his design."18

.....

17. Stephen Phillips, New Poems, p. 41, lines 1, 5; p. 43, lines 1 - 6.

18. Stephen Phillips, New Poems, p. 82, lines 11 - 13; p. 83, lines 1 - 6.

16. Stephen Phillips, Paolo and Francesca, p. 108, lines 13 - 14.

Man heeds not that deep cry from Calvary - a God appealing to the love of man - because of the barrier between them - the barrier of sin. There is a continual struggle between body and soul, between the physical and the spiritual. The youths who are searching for thrills in life feel like Miriam:

"I cannot feed my soul on 'Thou shalt not'"¹⁹

and

"No! I would rather drench my soul in sin
So I might feel this fire and grip this glory,
The color and the bloom and the music of life!"²⁰

And yet, Mr. Phillips is aware of a fundamental truth:

"That a good man, though in the dark he strives,
Hath still an instinct for the truer way."²¹

In the search for the truer way, the individual may turn aside from the highroads of speed and from the presence of crowds, and with the dignity of a little child may touch the sacred lily or take all the hours he needs to watch the southward flight of birds - to take his soul on a pilgrimage. And in turning aside he may perceive

" a figure whist and still,
With woman-touch for all these troubled brows,
And healing whispers for humanity!"²²

.....

19. Stephen Phillips, The Sin of David, p. 24, line 4.

20. Stephen Phillips, The Sin of David, p. 25, lines 8 - 11.

21. Stephen Phillips, Faust, p. XIII, lines, 18 - 20.

22. Stephen Phillips, Panama and Other Poems, p. 36, lines 10 - 12.

He may feel a newer glory given to the world and a splendor permeate the universe that does not issue from mankind, but from an Infinite Power. He may feel with the poet and with Julian these thoughts:

"O thou hast conquered, Galilean! I
Have fought my last against thee and I yield.

....
Lo! friends, one leans above me as I die,
The tender aspect of my Conqueror."²³

.....
83. Stephen Phillips, Panama and Other Poems, p. 37, lines
4 - 5, 8 - 9.

Chapter Six.

Conclusion.

"I stand, it seems, in the great path of Fate."
Harold before Senlac, line 20.

Chapter Six.

Conclusion.

At the beginning of this century there was not a more striking figure nor a more interesting personage in the realm of English poetry than Mr. Stephen Phillips, who was the idol of many poetry loving people.

As is well known, the youthful poet began his literary career as a composer of lyrics and narratives of a lyrical character. "Marpessa" and "Christ in Hades", among his first poems, were masterpieces of beauty and lyric music - and their maker was hailed as the new poet of blank verse. Soon Mr. Phillips, who had been an actor, became fired with a spirit of ambition to write a blank verse play. In 1900, "Paolo and Francesca", a poetic drama of surprising beauty and power, which testified to his possession of unsuspected gifts, was given to the public.

The genius who appears at the right moment has his way made plain for him, and there can be no doubt that Mr. Phillips was fortunate in the time he began to write. Tennyson had been dead for several years and there were signs that the world was growing restless and desirous of a new and enticing poetry. The great Victorians had failed upon the stage; neither Tennyson nor Browning had much stagecraft, and any

man who, in 1900, could produce an actable poetic drama had little contemporary rivalry to fear. Thus Stephen Phillips stepped firmly into the limelight, thundering out a new form of blank verse and of the heroic couplet, which was not Tennyson's, nor Swinburne's, nor Browning's, but inherited from Marlowe - a rich lyrical, metaphorical, but irresistibly powerful strain, so strong as to take the fancy captive.

It was then that Stephen Phillips had every kind of literary success. Very seldom has a young man upon his entry into the literary world been so enthusiastically greeted as was Mr. Phillips. The press notices of "Paolo and Francesca" ran in this strain: "It unquestionably places Mr. Phillips in the first rank of modern dramatists and of modern poetry. It does more, it claims his kinship with the aristocrats of his art: with Sophocles and with Dante." William Archer said: "Mr. Phillips has achieved the impossible. Sardou could not have ordered the action more skilfully, Tennyson could not have clothed the passion in words of purer loveliness." Thus scholarly critics names him with the world's immortals and the literary world lost its balance and was assured that at last the long-looked-for poet had arrived who would revive the poetic drama and the Elizabethan traditions.

At first glance it might seem that Mr. Phillips was the most fortunate of men - he had won fame almost instantly; he had a host of friends, and what is even better for a

man's fame and future, he had enemies who were neither silent nor few. In a single leap, he appeared to have acquired all that was needed for success in art - friends who encouraged him, a publisher who believed in him, leading managers - Beerbohm Tree and George Alexander who produced his plays, - a number of adverse critics, and a public that purchased his books.

But his early success, while seeming to present him with very unusual opportunities, in reality tempted him in a wrong direction. All this press hysteria which was only a part of the demonstrative acclaim heaped upon him, was a great burden upon the young poet. What kind of standard was this that Mr. Phillips was asked to live up to?

Instead of acquiring such instantaneous success, the poet needed something very different. Instead of being received as a finished master and encouraged to remain forever where he was, he should have been recognized as a master in the making and encouraged to eliminate the faults of his youth.

This stupendous and dazzling success had a most peculiar and perverse influence upon the poet. He appeared to possess no balancing power; he had nothing to stay his character against such enthusiastic laudations. A child-like simplicity is all that guarded him from severe criticism;

a naïveté that made inoffensive all his inflated ego and his conceits. Indeed, and unhappily, he was one of those unfortunate persons who are ruined by success. Now with more funds at his disposal, he plunged headlong into excitement of every kind and so lived a life devoted to pleasure and sensuality that his joy as a poet was slowly deadened. All this reacted on the quality of his work more and more and the result was soon apparent.

Fate worked in still another manner, with equal effectiveness, to overthrow the early success of Stephen Phillips. The poet was once an actor, and what he gained in experience on the stage seems to fall short of what he lost. He gained a working knowledge of stage-craft which meant that his plays would be well-constructed and would run rapidly; but through this experience behind the foot-lights he lost his grip on life, which means that his plays do not always ring true. There is in them very little of the genuine criticism of life which tempts the reader to turn again and again to a great play and enables him each time to discover some truth to ponder over.

In addition to this, Mr. Phillips was brought "into a peculiarly disastrous partnership with Sir Herbert Tree. It was a natural partnership; but it was nevertheless deplorable, because at His Majesty's Theatre the poet and his manager mutually encouraged one another in one and the same sovereign

and besetting sin. Stephen Phillips had most to beware of a tendency to substitute sounding rhetoric for significant sense. He had to be on his guard against all those shortcuts to sublimity which intending to be grand, are only grandiose. This was, at that time, exactly the case of Sir Herbert Tree as a producer of plays. ...Sir Herbert Tree encouraged all the young faults of the author of 'Paolo'. The poet who in 'Paolo' wrote 'venturing through forests toward her face!' in 'Herod' wrote 'masonry in morning magical; ' and in later years became bound to do that kind of thing automatically. 'Herod' definitely committed Stephen Phillips to grow younger year by year, to abound more and more in his faults, and to hide his great natural gifts behind an increasingly mechanical magnificence."¹ And always indolent and careless of his proof-sheets, he soon left his producer to fix the fashion of his plays - a disaster to his poetic and dramatic genius.

From the production of 'Herod', public ardor began to cool. The breath of extreme praise that had blown so warmly upon him began to blow cold. His dramatic and poetic power appeared to wane in strength and virility. There had been for some time a growing conviction that the hopes of the literary minded had been misplaced and that Mr. Phillips was not destined to achieve the great plays predicted of him.

.....

1. Living Age, CCLXXXVIII (January 29, 1916), p. 313.

The public became more disappointed as the years passed by, and showed its disappointment by cruel indifference and stinging criticism. A new group of young aspirants and critics discounted Mr. Phillips as of no account poetically; and though a few older men remained to praise him, what they said of him was discredited by the extravagant eulogies which had gone before. The change in valuation was a real change. The decline of Mr. Phillips's popularity was, in part, due to a more mature estimate of his attainments.

What an absurd world humanity lives in, where there seems to be no possible medium between neglecting an author entirely and setting him a little higher than Shakespeare!

Other writers became very prominent before the public eye - Yeats, Synge, Massfield; - there was nothing left for Stephen Phillips. There was financial bankruptcy and seemingly a spiritual bankruptcy, and there were difficulties which left his home broken. His will was broken and he was stung to the quick by the criticism of the fickle public. Throughout his career, he felt his life to be a losing struggle against a destiny which was himself. "Yet, those who looked upon him with sympathy noted that his many troubles did not bring cry or lamentation from Stephen Phillips. They began to see too that he was making an effort toward reconstruction."²

.....

That he had 'come back', that his reconstruction was a real one can be seen in the volume "Lyrics and Dramas", published in 1913. And yet he could not return to the poetic and dramatic power of "Paolo and Francesca."

The life and career of this poet are tragedies. "For ten years or more he presented the rare figure of a poet whom critical or uncritical alike appreciate. And yet upon the day of his death, (December 9, 1915), there was scarcely a single obituary notice which did not adopt a half-veiled, but unmistakable attitude of apology. For in the meanwhile the sudden change had intervened. Critical fashion, popular taste, the national standard of judgment, each and all of these constituents of fame had somehow or other shifted their ground. The poet, who had once perhaps been overpraised, was now unquestionably underestimated. The public had grown tired and ungrateful; it no longer did him justice. And the critics, reasonably discontented with his later work, had somehow forgotten or regretted their earlier confidence. It seems hard; and it is not altogether sound."³

Briefly, it can be said that Stephen Phillips could and did choose excellent dramatic material, that he had it within his power to weave a strong plot, that he could make a character live, that he could write beautiful poetry, and

.....

3. Living Age, CCKXXXVIII (March 25, 1916), p. 782.

that he was a thorough master of stagecraft. While the poet had it within his power to execute all this technique of drama making, he did not always fulfill the promise of mastery that he possessed - and therein lies the tragedy of his poetic career. After his second drama, the weakness in character portrayal was intensified. Soon the dramatist lacked the courage to face squarely the moral issues involved in his plots. Gradually this lack of moral courage developed into a sentimentalism and falsification of truth. This incompetence in character delineation, this failure to present life truly and to face moral issues squarely, led the dramatist to resort to exaggerated rhetoric and to non-essential spectacular settings and panoramic effects. These failures, which were only weaknesses at first, were undoubtedly encouraged by the early praise of a public which set the dramatist on a pedestal with Shakespeare. These are reasons for Mr. Phillips's loss of power.

Even with all his faults and failures, Mr. Phillips added to the rich poetical production of the nineteenth century that which was lacking, notwithstanding so many attempts made by famous men - Tennyson, Browning - : poetical plays of high quality strictly designed for and suited to the stage.

"The poetic drama is only rare because English poets have seldom cared to be dramatists as well. When a man of real poetic gifts happens, as in the case of Stephen

Phillips, to be also an actor with an intimate knowledge of the theater and the skill to use it, the Elizabethan miracle can once again become a business proposition. Unhappily for the English theater, the combination of gifts with which Stephen Phillips was endowed is so rarely discovered that when it actually appeared in 1900 the public lost its head, fell to exclaiming like men amazed, and finally lost its poet in a general clamor."⁴

The truth of the matter seems to be that Mr. Phillips is a lyrical poet with a very exceptional gift - he is greater as a poet than as a dramatist. It must be considered a misfortune for his fame that he accomplished almost nothing as a lyrist, as there is nothing like lyrical poetry to keep a name alive.

"The pageant and progress of poetry have often been likened to the Greek torch-race, which was ridden by horsemen in relays, each rider carrying on the torch for his appointed stage of the course, and then tossing it, alive and flaming, to his successor. In such a contest, 'where is nor first nor last', there are many competitors, upon whose achievements the final triumph depends; yet only one covers the concluding stage and passes the goal. The plaudits of the crowd are his; he is the representative of his comrades; but many half-forgotten efforts have gone to land him in the place of pride.

.....

4. Living Age, CCLXXVIII (January 29, 1916), p. 313.

The metaphor is a sound one. It still remains for the future to reveal the great poetic dramatist of our own time, who shall raise the stage to the glory and national honor which it enjoyed among the Elizabethans. We once hoped we had found the man in Stephen Phillips; but fortune, turning her wheel in the very hour of fulfilment, willed otherwise. Still, in the great relay race of his poetic generation, Stephen Phillips played no mean nor negligible part. Like the creatures of his own poetry, the torch that he handed on was one of brief but splendid brilliancy. It flamed to the heaven like fiery hair, blown in the wind, and the flakes that fell from it were bright with all the jewels of the Orient. It will glow forth again, beyond doubt, in the hand of another, brighter for his high service, and forgetful of its period of eclipse."⁵

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5. Living Age, CCLXXXVIII (March 25, 1916), pp. 789-790.

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